

THE BLUE COMFORTABLE.

BY HANNAH R. HUDSON.

It was an old-fashioned, low and wide keeping-room. The flickering fire, and the light of the kerosene lamp on the table, did not illumine its dusky corners, but made a centre of brightness around the hearth, on one side of which sat a dark-eyed girl of eighteen, busily knitting a blue yarn stocking; on the other sat a young farmer, tall and auburn-haired, with New England enterprise and acuteness stamped on a beardless face.

"How fast you knit!"

"Do I? I ought to. I've been knitting more or less since I was four years old."

"I learned to knit when I was a little fellow. I wonder if I could do anything at it now!"

"Suppose you try!" And the black eyes sparkled roguishly as John Nichols came to the side of their owner, and, sitting down on the wooden settle, took the knitting clumsily in his hands.

"I shall drop every stitch!"

"Well, I can pick them up again." And the speaker laughed outright at the perplexed brows bent above a bewildering tangle of needles and yarn. "Don't you know you're knitting backwards? Here, let me show you!"

For a moment their fingers came in contact, and the auburn hair touched the dark curls. It surely was not the heat of the fire that stained the teacher's cheek with sudden scarlet and flushed the learner's brow.

"What's the use?" was the despairing question, when, after much persistence and more merriment, the attempt was abandoned. "My hands were never made for knitting. Yours were, I think, Phœbe." And leaning back comfortably on the settle, the young man again watched the marvellous rapidity of the little brown fingers.

There was a long silence. Phœbe's cheeks were still twin roses as she nervously knitted and knitted, and racked her brain for something to say. John finally broke the pause by an abrupt inquiry.

"Phœbe, did you know I had bought the Hawley farm?"

"Yes, father was saying so last night."

"What did he think about it?"

"He said you had made a very good move."

"And you? Do you think so too?"

"I? O, I—I—of course I do."

"The land is very excellent. I hope to get a house put up before spring."

A house! Phœbe started, and then bent, with renewed assiduity, over the heel of her stocking. John went on in a somewhat embarrassed fashion:

"Not that I expect to live there at present. But Hawley farm will probably be my home when I—if I am ever married."

"Yes." Phœbe would have given the world to have arrested the blush that spread its vivid crimson over cheek, neck and ear. Rendered defiant by the certainty that John had noted her confusion, she shook her curls forward to hide her face, and desperately changed the subject.

"We are going to have a bee next Friday, and get a lot of quilts and comfortables made up."

"Are you?" John tried hard not to smile as he received this sudden piece of information. "I believe your sister said something about it to me last Sunday. By the way, Phœbe, you haven't been to church for three weeks."

"No, I know I haven't."

"And I have been every Sunday, hoping to walk home with you."

There was a faint response to this. John continued more boldly:

"I hardly ever have the chance of seeing you alone. To-night is the first night I ever found your father and mother and Jennie all away together. Phœbe, are you in a great hurry about that stocking?"

Phœbe was going to insist that she was; but, catching a glimpse of John's mischievous blue eyes, she was surprised by a laugh. Before she could recover her dignity the stocking was drawn out of her hands and thrown on the table beyond her reach.

"Now I suppose you are satisfied," Phœbe said, as she crossed her hands in her lap and stared straight at the fire, ignoring the telltale crimson on her cheeks. But it appeared that John was not satisfied, for

the curls still screened the downcast face.

"Have you made a vow never to look at me again?"

The obstinate head would not turn. So John's arm was laid across the high back of the settle, and his fingers gently touched the scarlet cheek furthest from him. Perforce, the blushing face was brought into view.

"Phœbe!"

Before the word had well left his lips a sharp clash against the window behind them brought both occupants of the settle to their feet. There was an indistinct sound of a laugh without, and, a moment later, a girl ran into the room, tossing off her hood as she came, and broke into another laugh at sight of the two startled faces.

"Don't look so cross, John! Icicles are very cheap, and I couldn't help giving you a start when I saw the backs of your two heads over the settle."

Phœbe glanced discomposedly from her sister's quizzical face to the uncurtained windows.

"Why don't you sit down again? Father and mother are most here."

"Thank you," was the stiff response. "I must go. I see it is nine o'clock already."

"Dear, dear! One would think I'd committed a crime!" And Jennie looked from Phœbe's confused countenance to John's vexed one. "I'm sure it was a very little thing."

John seemed rather ashamed of his momentary annoyance. Although he still insisted on going, he managed to smile at saucy Jennie as he pulled on his overcoat. As for Phœbe, she said scarcely a word. And when John held her hand a moment before wishing her good-night, Jennie was close by and she dared not meet his eyes.

But long after Jennie was asleep, her sister lay gazing into the dark, and crimsoning, half with shame and half with delight, at the memory of John's looks and words. If Jennie had not come in John would—surely John was going to ask her to marry him! Marry John! Ah, if he loved her, what in all the world did she want to make her happy? For, from her childhood up (as she confessed to herself in the dark, with burning cheeks) she had loved John!

To what a rose-colored life she awoke! How light seemed all the burdens of care that had often seemed so heavy! All day long she sang at her work, and at night she

smiled at her own bright face as she stood before her little mirror tying on her gayest ribbon. For she felt sure that John would come that evening.

She did not progress rapidly with her knitting. After the clock struck seven she started and flushed at every sound. But no John arrived. Half past eight. Jennie yawned over a book, her mother dozed in her chair. Nine o'clock. Phœbe was disappointed and vaguely troubled, although she took herself to task for being so. A hundred things might have prevented John from coming, but—yet—yet she had been so sure he *would* come!

As usual her father returned from the village at ten, and, having settled himself in his chair, prepared to give the news of the day.

"There's rather a bad affair for Nyes just come out in the village. The man in charge of one of his Canadian farms has sold off a lot of valuable cattle and absconded with the money. Good deal of a loss."

"Why, you don't say so!" Sleepy Mrs. Gray was wide awake in a moment. "What is he going to do?"

"O, he's sent up young Nichols to see about it. He's Nyes's head man. He left this afternoon as soon as the news came."

Phœbe started, and asked, trying to speak unconcernedly:

"Is—is it likely to take long?"

"To settle the thing up? Well, there's no telling. I guess John'll bring it out right somehow."

And Phœbe went up stairs, took off her gay ribbon, and went to bed with a curious feeling that there was nothing to happen just at present. To be sure, nothing *had* happened yet, but there would—yes there would—as soon as John came home!

During the next two days she was too busy to think. For the quilting bee was to come on Friday, and she had everything to see to. Phœbe had to assume most of the burdens at home, for Mrs. Gray was one of the "incapable" class, and pretty careless. Jennie wanted nothing but her own ease.

The bright well-ordered rooms in which the guests were received on the day of the bee in nowise disgraced Phœbe's reputation as a housewife. I wish I had space to describe that old-fashioned gathering—to picture the queer costumes, rehearse the quaint language, to paint the faces, young and old,

benevolent and sour, plump and angular that rose in lines above the level of gay patchwork stretched on wooden frames. But how many of my readers have seen just such assemblages, in just such an ancient farmhouse, on just such a sunny windy winter afternoon!

To Phœbe quilting bees seemed highly unpleasant occasions. Everything had gone wrong that day. She was tired, and the sun and snow made her head ache. Besides, she was harassed constantly by calls for this and that, and was kept running hither and thither, with hardly a moment's intermission.

At twilight came the responsibility of supper. The girl in the kitchen was small help, and the quilts were finished at exactly the wrong time. Of course Phœbe had to attend to putting the comfortables on the frames just when she wanted to see to baking the biscuits. The candles were lighted. Six o'clock had struck, and Farmer Gray was already home from town. Just as he came in at the door a series of sentences were addressed to Phœbe, who was tacking layers of cotton to the underside of a comfortable, with desperate speed, intent only on getting the cover on and going to see about matters in the kitchen. The first cry was from her mother:

"Phœbe, where *did* I put those needles?"

"Do you know where the baisting cotton is?" inquired one of the workers.

"Did you know the corner of this blue cover was torn?" inquired another.

"Phœbe,"—this from her father—"here is a letter for you."

"Phœbe, O Phœbe!" exclaimed Jennie, through the half open door, "come here a minute! I've spilled the preserve, and Bridget's burned herself trying to save the biscuit."

"O dear! dear!" Phœbe had dived under the comfortable frames to search for the needles and cotton. Emerging to take the letter, she was horrified by the news from the kitchen, and dropping thimble, needle, cotton and missive in a heap, she ran to attend to the quince-anointed tablecloth and scorched biscuits. Then Bridget's hand must be salved, and afterward she remembered the torn corner of the comfortable cover. On her return to the keeping-room, however, she found the cover already baisted on the frames, and a line of workers commencing to sprig.

"We found the corner would stretch right," explained a spectacled female, "and we put the cover on without waiting to tack the rest of the cotton. The sprigging'll hold it."

The excitement grew less after that. Supper was gone through with. The comfortables were sprigged, bound and finished by busy hands. At ten o'clock the last of the hive of bees had gone, and the completed work lay folded on the spare-room bed. It was then that Phœbe, picking up shreds from the floor, happened to think of the letter she had dropped. It was nowhere to be seen. And after five minutes' search, quite tired out, she dismissed the thought of it with a careless "O, I guess it's of no consequence!" and went to bed.

Weeks dragged on and John Nichols did not come home. The case in Canada proved a hard one to settle, so Phœbe was told when she asked about it. The agent had not been found, and John still remained on the rifled farm. Well, it was all right, of course, but still Phœbe wondered at his long silence and absence. She did not like to ask about him, for nobody knew that John was anything to her. And he was not anything to her—yet. What had he said? Nothing that a girl could base any hopes on. Yet he had looked and acted like a lover, and Phœbe still hoped.

But two or three careless words dropped by a neighbor one March evening thrilled through her like an electric shock:

"So John Nichols is home?"

"Yes, been home a week. They do say he's left Nyes. Anyway, he's hard at work on his own farm. They didn't catch the agent, and John looks rather sobered down."

What have I to tell about the days that followed? Nothing but what the reader must already understand. Phœbe's disappointment was only one of the many in the world, but it was none the less bitter for that. At first she was bewildered and knew not what to think. But doubt settled into sad certainty. John never came once to the Gray farm, and the weeks dragged on again, now unsweetened by hope. Pride did not come to her aid at once. When she met John first, on the village street, she looked at him with her heart in her eyes, thinking—poor Phœbe—that now the misunderstanding between them would surely be made right. But she was greeted in a

manner so cold, grave and constrained, that she could only wonder in silence. John had changed in those three months of absence. He was pale, and had lost the frank pleasant smile of old. Phœbe was reserved in her turn, almost resentful. A strange way to meet a woman to whom lately he had almost proposed! And what had *she* done? For John seemed displeased for some cause with her. And, ah! to think how foolish she had been, and how sure of John's love! Her cheeks grew hot with shame, and her lips were shut in determined fashion as she walked rapidly homeward. She had a few things John had given her—books, valentines, and a little bracket he had carved himself. Before she slept that night every one of these was burned, and there was a new look in Phœbe's eyes that told of sorrow resolutely battled with.

A year went by; and when the June roses bloomed again there came a new development, harder yet for Phœbe to bear. John began to come to the house again, but not to see her! How it came about it would be hard to tell. Pretty winsome Jennie was a favorite with everybody. It was no wonder that John tired of his hermit life, and was attracted by her smiles. I mean it was no wonder to any one but Phœbe—poor sore-hearted Phœbe, who sat alone in moonlit evenings and heard the low tones and laughter of the lovers float up from the gate or garden. "Ah well—it had always been so with women!" Phœbe scorned herself because she cared, and held herself aloof from Jennie's lover, whose cold avoidance gave her little occasion to manifest her disdain. What is there that a woman cannot endure? Pain settled into apathy. And when one November day Jennie blushingly whispered the secret that Phœbe knew so well, she only went quietly on tucking the ends of a blue comfortable into the bed she was making.

"Yes, dear. I am very glad you are so happy."

But the next day, when John had received the old people's assent and blessing, and afterward mutely turned to her, she did not find it so easy to express good wishes. She put a cold hand into his outstretched one, and took refuge in a stilted phrase of congratulation.

Looking into John's eyes, as she finished, she was startled to find him gazing at her in

a way she was at a loss to comprehend, and that somehow made her think of a picture she had once seen; the picture of an exile gazing after a ship that bears away his friends. She thought there was something of the same look on the face before her—but why should John look thus at a woman whom he had not cared to win?

A year later John and Jennie were married. This story is full of hiatuses, and the six years that followed the marriage held few events that it is necessary to tell. Jennie was installed mistress of Hawley farm, and Phœbe, people said, settled down into a contented old maid. Was she contented? Ah, who was ever contented to lay aside the crown of life?

As far as possible she put her sister's husband out of her thoughts. She was bitterly ashamed that she could not quite do so. And the consciousness that she could not made her erect a barrier of reserve between herself and him, that estranged them more and more as time went on. But she could not help pitying John, for things happened as she had known they would. Jennie made but a poor helpmate, and when her health failed she lost beauty and temper together. The home that ought to have been a refuge to the hard-working farmer, was made a purgatory by the querulousness of a sick wife, and the fretfulness and mischief of ill-managed children. Poor John did the best he could, but the cares and worries of his life showed themselves in prematurely silvered hair and furrowed brow. And Phœbe saw all, and at first, I am sorry to say, had a certain gloomy satisfaction in the troubles of her whilom lover. But this changed to pity, and when—in the seventh springtime after her wedding, Jennie was laid in her grave—the elder sister was shocked out of her coldness.

She tried to comfort John as kindly as if she had really been his sister. She took the children home to the Gray farm, and herself went in quest of a housekeeper to take charge of the disordered household. But when she had found a capable and energetic maid-of-all-work, she withdrew again a little into her aloofness—fearing her brother-in-law might think her too officious. And time went on again. Jennie's grave in the churchyard was covered with withered leaves, then with winter snows. And things at Hawley farm hitched along uneasily as ever, in spite of Phœbe's monitions and

contributions. The riotous children, the heavy work, the impatient and gloomy master of the house, and the fiery maid-servant, were all very stubborn facts to manage. And Phoebe, who felt responsibility over, as well as interest in, the well-being of her dead sister's household, was at her wit's end to know how to help them.

When, one fine April morning, one of her little nephews stopped on his way to school and informed her that "the girl had given warning," Phoebe looked at her mother, in despair, exclaiming:

"What shall I do now? I've tried all the girls in the village, and not one will stay. I did hope Melissa Strong would do better than the others, but she's going, too."

And Mrs. Gray, after considering a moment, responded, doubtfully:

"I don't see but you'll have to go over yourself a while, and get things kinder to rights. Maybe then Melissa won't go off."

Phoebe did not take kindly to the idea, but no other course suggested itself. So, after passing a sleepless night, revolving ways and means, she decided to conquer her pride and reluctance, and went over to Hawley farm, where she found Miss Melissa Strong with a cloudy brow and compressed lips, scrubbing the sunshiny kitchen floor.

"It's the fourth time I've washed it this week. Them there young ones are the very old Harry!"

It was a forlorn household. As Melissa said, there warn't a thing in order outside the kitchen, and much as ever she could keep that decent. Untidiness and neglect were everywhere. Every article of furniture in the cheerless rooms looked battered and old. No womanly cares had been exercised there, and there was no woman's presence to make a homelike atmosphere. Phoebe sighed as she hung her bonnet and shawl on a dusty hook in the hall.

"Melissa, suppose I stay and put the house to rights, and try to start things in the right way. Perhaps I can make some arrangement about your having somebody to help you. Anyhow, you won't go right away, will you?"

Melissa's face did not look unpromising, though she would not commit herself. Phoebe donned a calico gown, and went to work in earnest. She took the dining and sitting-rooms first. When John came in to dinner he was astonished to find two clean-swept bright apartments, in one of which

was spread a most satisfactory dinner. Melissa's face was far less cloudy. And in the closet a slender calico-clad figure was rummaging a drawer to find a pinafore for the youngest boy.

"Phoebe! Why, Phoebe!"

"I thought perhaps if I could make it easier for Melissa a while, I could persuade her to stay."

That was all Phoebe said, and John's relieved grateful face was reward enough. Phoebe was very happy in the days that followed, days of hard work though they were. For she felt that she was doing her duty, and she liked to lift John's burdens, and make him laugh once in a while the old pleasant laugh she used to listen to.

The house grew to look like a different place. "There was enough to do with," to quote Melissa again, "but there hadn't been any one to do it." Somehow, the mischievous children were ruled and quieted, and a thorough renovation of the dusty forlorn apartments took place. A few purchases, a good deal of washing and polishing—new homemade curtains, new bright covers for lounges and chairs, made a wonderful change. Melissa forgot to be cross, and John forgot to be gloomy.

By the middle of May the house was pretty thoroughly set to rights. And Phoebe, coming down from the attic one morning with her arms full of bed-clothing, said to Melissa:

"I believe there is only one thing more to be seen to, now that the boys' clothes are in order. I think I'll rip these soiled comfortable, and you can wash the covers and the dirty blankets. When the covers are clean I can put in new cotton, and make them as good as new."

"Yes'm. You aint goin' away very soon, be you, Miss Phoebe?"

"Yes, I must go next week sometime. I'll see the second girl nicely started first."

In that sunny May afternoon Phoebe sat down in the little front hall and began to rip comfortable. There were five—and three were those Jennie had brought from home. One was a blue one, faded and stained now with use. One of those comfortable that had been finished at a quilting bee ten years ago, about the time—but Phoebe stopped herself suddenly as she was falling into this line of thought. She did not want to remember that sad old time, for to-day she felt as happy as the birds

that trilled in the elms, and the child that was rolling in the lush green grass and dandelions outside the door. "How pleasant the world is in spring!" Phœbe thought to herself, as she worked and sang, and laughed at the child. And presently John came across from the meadow, and lifted the crowing boy to his shoulder.

"Always busy, Phœbe!"

"Yes," she said, cheerily. "I want to get everything in order for once. I must go home next week."

The sunshine went out of John's face, but he only said, as he put the child down again, and gazed across the fields, with a shadow of the old trouble in his eyes:

"I don't know how I can ever thank you for what you have done for me. Men seem to be helpless creatures unless they're taken care of, in spite of their pretensions."

"Well, you're going to be taken care of. Melissa and Sarah and I have an excellent understanding, and I shall see that things are kept right over here."

John did not look much more cheerful. He fell into a fit of musing, from which he presently roused himself and made an effort to talk.

"What are you doing with the comfortable?"

"Ripping it. It's going to be washed. You needn't laugh at it—it used to be bright blue, and very pretty. I cut it out myself."

"How long ago was that?" was the amused question.

"Ten years ago."

Ten years! There was a shadow on both brows, and a silence, which Phœbe by-and-by broke by a relieved, "There!" as she cut the last sprig. Pulling off the cover, she was bundling the ridgy cotton together, with the idea of putting it in the ragbag,

when something fell out from among it, and tumbled on the floor between her and John. An oblong, crumbled, yellow (and unbroken) envelop.

Both stooped to pick it up. John reached it first, and Phœbe, leaning forward, read with him an address that had not faded in the least:

"Miss Phœbe Gray. T—, Mass."

John's handwriting, and postmarked Canada. Phœbe saw it all at one glance, and sank back in her chair white as death. John stood looking from the letter to her face, his own cheek reddened with a rush of color.

"Phœbe, it's your letter—it's my letter to you—the letter you never answered, and I—I thought—"

Phœbe's impetuous fingers seized the letter from his hand.

"It's my letter, and I never read it, and I *will* read it now!" she cried, heedless of everything else, anxious only to solve the mystery which had puzzled her so for ten years.

And she did read it—half through. Then looking up with a face scarlet with blushes, she met the eyes of the man who had written his love on that yellow sheet ten years before.

"O John! John! And I never knew you cared about me!"

"And I was so sure you did not care for me! O Phœbe, how long I watched for an answer to that letter!"

Reader, do you think he had to wait much longer for his answer? If you do, I will tell you what Melissa saw when she went to ask what Miss Phœbe would have for supper. She saw John sitting by Phœbe's side, with his arm around her, and the cover and wadding of a blue comfortable lying in a heap on the floor at their feet.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

BY MARY FRANCES WILLIAMS.

IF I should live a century, I should not forget that summer at the old country house in Litchfield, where my story transacted itself; and one evening, in particular, will remain in my memory so long as I have a memory, because it was the opening scene of the summer's drama.

How distinctly I recall the scene: the unlighted room, dusky and full of dark shadows, and dim uncertain shapes; the low windows opened wide, for it was a sultry night, more like mid-August than early June; the noises which came in from the garden—sudden whirring sounds of insects, and strange wild cries of nightbirds; and we, sitting here and there about the room, or lounging on the veranda, and saying very little, for we seemed all possessed with the same dreamy silent mood.

Madelon Eastlake had been playing and singing to us, and she still sat by the piano, crooning in an undertone sweet disconnected snatches of ballads and love-songs. Now it was a bit of French sentiment, now a verse of some tender Scotch ballad, and again, a line or two of a Spanish madrigal; for Madelon could sing anything. Now and then she softly touched the keys with her left hand, on the white forefinger of which a magnificent solitaire glinted and sparkled through the dusk. It was her engagement ring; Ralph Descartes, the millionaire, had placed it on her finger.

He stood outside on the veranda, leaning against the window-casement, and smoking a cigar. A slim light-haired youth of twenty-four—just Madelon's own age—with a weak, good-natured, effeminate face, a soft heart, and, uncharitable people said, a vacuum where his brains should have been; a well-meaning, commonplace young fellow, who would have been nothing if he had not been a millionaire, and would not have been that if his father had not died without making a will. This was Madelon's betrothed husband. People said it was a good match for her, whose only fortune was her matchless face. Ireneo de Rivas said it was a fair barter—her beauty for Ralph Descartes's gold!

Young De Rivas was Madelon's old lover;

or rather, he was one of them, for she was a very queen of hearts, and "her smile that blessed one lover's heart, had broken many more." But he was the one who had wooed her most persistently, and whom she had seemed most likely to accept before Descartes appeared to her in the character of a suitor. De Rivas was a Cuban, expatriated on account of the insurrection, and belonged to an old family which had formerly been wealthy, but had been reduced to poverty by the war. He was a handsome, high-spirited young man, and though hasty in his temper, had many noble qualities; and in those earlier days it had pleased me to see him with Madelon. His swarthy skin and raven curls made an artistic contrast to her lily face, with its rose-pink cheeks and sapphire eyes, and its frame of yellow braids. It had pleased me then, and would have pleased me now. But I was much surprised that he had chosen to accompany our party, knowing as he did that Madelon's affianced would be with us during our summer idling among the Litchfield hills. Charley Harrington had asked him, yet, though they were inseparable friends, I thought it very strange that Ireneo should be willing, for the sake of Charley's society, to expose his pride to such a mortification.

On the evening of which I am speaking, Charley Harrington was sitting half in and half out of the window where Mr. Descartes stood smoking; his feet were sprawled out on the veranda, while his elbow rested on the cushioned seat of an easy-chair that stood inside. His head was leaning back against the window-casement, and the pale half-light of the new moon was shining on his upturned face, making it look strangely white and rigid, like—I shuddered at the thought as I looked at him—like the face of a dead man! The same pallid sheen was on his sunny brown hair; it had a gray and faded look that it will have again sometime, if he lives to be old. I can never think of Charley Harrington without recalling his strange appearance as I saw him then.

Rosaleen Sheldon, his pretty cousin and fiancée, sat upon the floor in the midst of a billowy swirl of rose-colored flounces, her

bare white arms folded on the window-seat, and her face turned away from the room. They were not making love; Charley and Rosaleen were an example to all the engaged couples that ever I knew. I don't know how they may have conducted themselves in private, but they never indulged in public love-making.

Ireneo de Rivas was not present; he had strolled away somewhere, just at sunset, with Ivy Leversee at his side, and neither of them had since been seen. This was no marvel to me; when Ivy Leversee walked off into the fields at the hour of sunset, in company with a gentleman, she meant flirtation; and Ivy took her time about that sort of pastime.

Ivy Leversee was my niece; and I daily thanked my patron saint that she was not my daughter. How my sister Augusta endured life with that girl to look after was more than I could comprehend. If I had known as much about her as I very soon came to know, I wouldn't have undertaken the responsibility of her for three months—not for an interest in Barkhamstead, as they say up in Litchfield!

Flirt? She would have flirted with her grandfather, if the old gentleman had been there, and no younger man convenient! I do believe it was in her nature, and she couldn't help it. When I scolded her, she would open her great gray eyes, and look at me in such innocent astonishment; and then she would assume an aggrieved and dignified air, and remark that she and Mr. Smith were merely discussing ritualism, out there on the veranda all the evening! or that Mr. Jones was illustrating the inertia of matter with the croquet mallet and balls, when they stayed out in the croquet ground till past twelve o'clock! And surely there was no impropriety in that! So I gave it up at last, and contented myself with occasionally writing home to her mother that I could not do anything with her.

When I first contemplated spending the summer in Litchfield, I proposed to take no one with me except Ivy and Madelon Eastlake—who was no relation to me, but I loved her because she was the daughter of a man whom I would have married if he had asked me, when I was young and pretty myself. But he never asked me; he married another woman, and I was an old maid now, and had ceased to regret him long ago; but I liked to have his daughter about me.

No sooner had she promised to go with me to the hills, than Ralph Descartes came begging permission to accompany us; and I could not very well refuse—especially as he would have followed Madelon, in any case. Ralph was a polite, good-tempered young fellow too, with an inexhaustible amount of patience, and I rather liked him, if he was not very brilliant. I was wrong when I said he would have been nothing if he had not been a millionaire; he would have made an incomparable dry goods clerk.

So I said he might go; and then Ivy Leversee must have her dear friend Rosaleen—for she and Rosaleen Sheldon were intimate friends of the deadliest type—and that young lady very willingly agreed to make one of the party. Whereupon, Charley Harrington invited himself to join us. He said I invited him, but I did nothing of the sort; and also, he coolly invited Ireneo de Rivas. So here was I chaperoning three young ladies, each with a young man dangling after her. However, I consoled myself with the reflection that two of the couples were properly "engaged;" and as for Ireneo—well, Ivy displayed a laudable intention of keeping his time well occupied!

I was wondering how much or how little he had gotten over his old passion for Madelon, and whether Ivy would succeed in making a fool of him, when Rosaleen started up, with a great whirl of rose-colored silk and a scattering of the heliotrope scent that always hung about her, and exclaimed:

"Is that you, Ivy?" And then, as Ivy came in alone:

"Where is Mr. De Rivas?"

"He is coming presently; I ran away from him," said Ivy.

There was a hint of dissatisfaction in her tone, and I guessed that Ireneo had not been inclined to flirt. As Ivy came into the room, Charley Harrington got up and offered her the chair against which he had been leaning.

"Thanks, Charley; I'm so tired! Isn't it awfully warm? If Litchfield is like this in June, I don't know what we shall do in July," she said, petulantly, as she threw herself into the chair, and picked up a palm-leaf fan.

"Pray let me—" And Charley possessed himself of the palm-leaf, and commenced briskly fanning her.

It was too dark to see his face now that he had moved out of the moonlight, but I

fancied there was something unusual in his tone, and he bent nearer and nearer to her as he plied the fan, saying something that I could not hear, though I sat quite near to them. She interrupted him, impatiently:

"Do be still! I want to hear what Madelon is singing."

"While waters wimple to the sea,
While day blinks in the lift sae hie,
Till clay could death shall blin' my e'e,
Ye aye shall be my dearie!"

That was what Madelon was singing, and Charley listened silently until it was finished, and Ivy was murmuring:

"How sweet!"

Then he arose and bent over the back of her chair, saying vehemently:

"Ivy, do you believe—" The rest was whispered, but I could hear how his voice shook with the hurried words, though I could not distinguish their import.

"Of course I don't believe it!" coolly answered Ivy, aloud.

"What do you not believe, Ivy?" asked Rosaleen, who had been standing at the window while this episode was in progress.

"That Madelon sings her pretty Scotch songs for the special benefit of Charley Harrington!" laughed Ivy.

Charley muttered something in an irritated tone, and turning very suddenly, went out on the veranda, where he was presently heard asking Ralph Descartes for a cigar.

I thought it was high time to have in the lights, and so I left the room to order them, for our country house was destitute of bells. When I returned with a "help" bringing two kerosene lamps, Madelon was playing a lovely German melody without words, that she had played a score of times for Ireneo de Rivas, but never, to my knowledge, for any one but him. I was sure that she had not played it before since her engagement. And there in the door stood Ireneo, the dewy cluster of sweetbrier blooms in his hand denoting that he had just returned from his walk, and stopped there, rooted to the threshold by the spell of that well-remembered music!

It ceased, a moment after I came in with the lights, and Ivy and Rosaleen went into raptures about it, as usual; but Ireneo de Rivas walked over to Madelon's side, and silently laid the brier-roses beside her hand upon the keys. She took them with a low-spoken, "Thanks, Mr. De Rivas." But

she neither turned nor raised her eyes. He never spoke a word, but moved away as quietly as he had approached.

Ralph Descartes came in just then, and Madelon left the piano and talked with him for a few minutes; but she very soon went away up to her room, and I noticed that she took the brier-roses with her.

We had made arrangements to "go a fishing" next morning, and we were all up before sunrise, rushing about in the ardor of preparation, and hastening as if the fish had given notice of their intention to decamp before midday; and, after all, we had to wait nearly an hour for Farmer Hobson to arrive with the big wagon which was to take us to the trout brook, a famous stream "out beyond Hartland."

Farmer Hobson made his appearance at last, however, and we piled ourselves and our lunch baskets into his roomy vehicle; I stowing away a book or two, in case I should not find "fishing" an amusement after my taste—of which I had my doubts in advance. But the rest of the party were sufficiently enthusiastic to atone for any lack of appreciation on my part. The gentlemen carried a formidable amount of bait and tackle, and looked as if they meant business; while Ivy and Rosaleen had each a preposterously ornamental fishing-rod, that came apart and fitted together again in all sorts of unexpected places, and was provided with pretty little "bobs" and "sinkers," and a dozen other things that I could not begin to understand; but those girls displayed them with the airs of old experienced fishermen. As for Madelon, she had no outfit at all; she said she could relieve me when I had exhausted myself with piscatory success.

I thought I had never seen Madelon so beautiful as she was that day; she was perfectly radiant. I could not tell why she looked so unusually well; there was nothing at all imposing about her dress. Ivy looked like a cross between Diana and a Hamadryad, and Rosaleen was gotten up in the most ravishing half-bloomer costume you can imagine; but Madelon was not a girl who would make a toilet to go fishing in. Nor did the effect seem to be in her manner, for she was unusually quiet; it was something in her appearance altogether undefined. But when she came out to the wagon, attended by Ralph carrying her shawl, I was smitten with an intensity of

admiration that, if I had been a man, would have made me frantically jealous of him.

So I thought I understood the feeling which caused Ireneo de Rivas to start and catch his breath so sharply, as she approached, and then spring forward, with burning eyes and quivering lips, to lift her to her seat; for we were all in the wagon except Madelon and Ralph, who had been waiting while she went to get her shawl. She said it was her shawl that she went back to her room for, but I could not see what she wanted of it, for I had brought out one for her.

As I was saying, I thought I understood Ireneo's feelings, and I pitied him; but I was shortly awakened to my mistake. The true cause of his excitement was revealed when Ralph bent over to Madelon who sat in front of him, and lightly touching the knot of flowers that she wore upon her bosom, said:

"Those flowers have a very peculiar fragrance, Madelon. What are they?"

"Sweetbrier!" answered Madelon, in a very low voice; and her cheeks flamed scarlet as she spoke.

"So that is sweetbrier?" said Ralph, admiringly. "It is the first I have ever seen. Will you give me one?"

He confidently extended his hand, but with a quick jealous motion, Madelon put up her own and covered the blossoms, as if to shield them from his touch. She blushed hotly again, as she replied:

"O no! I do not wish to disarrange them. I dare say you can find some, if you care for them."

I glanced at Ireneo. He was regarding Madelon with an intent and searching look, which changed slowly to an expression of peculiar triumph and resolution, as he turned his gaze for a moment upon her affianced, surveying him from head to foot with one quick comprehensive glance, as if he measured the man. I have said that I liked Ralph, and in all else I wished him well, but he was no mate for my peerless Madelon; and I was not sorry to read in the flashing black eyes of Ireneo de Rivas that he had not accepted his defeat so tamely as I thought; that he and Ralph Descartes were rivals!

It was a heavenly morning. The air was warm with the June sunshine, and sweet with the scent of summer flowers. To breathe it was like inhaling the ether of

life. I felt young myself, and did not wonder that the young people were in the wildest spirits. They sung, they laughed, they joked, they were as merry and as noisy as a half dozen children; and I sat beaming upon them like an elderly guardian angel, until we reached the trout-brook and camped upon its hemlock-shaded banks.

"Scenery" is not my weak point; if it had been, I should have camped in that Elysian spot for the remainder of my natural life. If it had depended upon me to catch the fish, they would have possessed their lives in peace forevermore, for I had no desire to do anything except recline upon the velvet moss that grew down to the water's edge and cushioned all the rocks like satin couches, while I listened in dreamy delight to the smothered roar of the waterfall just below our halting spot, where the brook plunged with one dizzy leap down the face of a precipice, and beat itself to foam among the jagged rocks below. Naturally, our first proceeding was to walk down and view the waterfall. It was a beautiful sight, and we rhapsodized about it to such an exhaustive extent that I really cannot find adjectives with which to repeat the process now; therefore I will excuse my readers.

I wasn't quite so enthusiastic as the young people; chiefly because I could not help feeling nervous at the careless manner in which they *would* walk along the edge of the precipice. It was a sheer descent, of sufficient height to make my head swim when I looked over, and they persisted in keeping close to the very brink, until at last I could stand it no longer, and I insisted that they should come away.

"Because," I prudently suggested, "if we were going to fish, we must not linger here all day."

So we went back and fished—all of us except Madelon, who stood leaning against a great tree, dreamily watching the rush of water as it swept down the wall of the rock. She said we need not wait for her; she would come presently. And the rest of us went and fished. The gentlemen applied themselves to the serious business of the occasion, and industriously fished for trout. The girls fished for—well, no matter; but of course those hamadryad costumes were not gotten up for nothing! Charley Harrington had more trouble with Ivy's bait than he had with his own; and when Rosa-

leen triumphantly announced that she had caught a fish, Ireneo de Rivas had to draw it out for her! As for me, I fished my book up from the depths of my basket, and comfortably disposed myself to read.

After a while we had lunch, set forth in fairy fashion on a broad flat rock; after which we strolled away, one or two at a time, to the falls again. First, Ivy and Ralph Descartes finished their lunch and went off together toward the cliffs; then Rosaleen and Charley followed; and last, Ireneo, Madelon and I, an embarrassed and uncomfortable trio, straggled after the others.

Just as we came up with them, a sudden squall of wind arose, and Ivy Leverssee's brigandish straw hat sailed up into the air, and dropped out of sight down behind the cliff.

"O my hat!" shrieked Ivy. "Do get it, somebody!" as if the gentlemen had been provided with wings.

"I'll get it," promptly responded Charley Harrington; and he came forward with much animation to the edge of the cliff, where he stopped suddenly and looked over, rather dubiously.

"I don't know," he muttered, doubtfully; then, with a resolute air:

"But I'll try it."

Ivy glanced sidewise at Ireneo de Rivas, but he did not stir. He eyed Charley's movements disapprovingly, and as that young gentleman threw off his coat preparatory to climbing down the rocks, Ireneo remarked, rather curtly, but with evident anxiety:

"That's a foolhardy undertaking; better not try it, Charley."

"O Mr. De Rivas, do you think it is dangerous? Really?" cried Ivy, sweetly; but a red spot burned in each cheek, and her eyes were flashing, as she added, to Charley:

"Are *you* afraid, Charley? Pray don't go; I shall be quite alarmed if you do!"

After that, of course Charley would have gone, if he had gone through fire; and Ireneo seemed to appreciate the fact, for he shrugged his shoulders and curled his lip sarcastically, as he turned away.

Charley cautiously commenced to swing himself over the top of the cliff, and we all watched him with breathless interest. By going up close to the edge and looking down, we could see the hat where it had fallen amidst a mass of pale blue flowers,

such as I had never seen before, which grew upon a shelf of rock, half way down the cliff. It looked indeed a perilous descent, and I shivered to see how carelessly the young man attempted it. I looked at Rosaleen, but she evidently did not see the gravity of the situation, for she stood smiling and unconcerned, and gayly remarked to Ireneo de Rivas:

"Charley will win a feather for his cap, won't he? What a chance for romantic gallantry! Why didn't *you* volunteer, Mr. De Rivas?"

"Because I've no notion of risking my life for a bonnet," returned Ireneo, dryly.

An interval of some minutes passed, and then Charley reappeared, laboriously climbing up again to the mossy promontory where we stood awaiting him. He came up disconsolate, without the hat.

"I'm sorry, Ivy," he said, regretfully, "but it can't be done."

Ralph Descartes removed his perpetual cigar from between his lips, and tossed it over the cliff, remarking coolly:

"It can be done!"

Charley flushed hotly, as he retorted:

"Well, Descartes, if you think you can do it, I should like to see you try!"

"I'm going to," said Ralph.

"I would not do it, Ralph," interposed Madelon, speaking for the first time.

"Why, don't you wish me to?" asked Ralph, eagerly turning toward her.

"I do not think it is safe," returned Madelon, coldly. "Mr. Harrington would not have failed if there had been any possibility of success."

"I shan't fail," retorted Ralph, shortly; and over the rocks he went.

Ralph was rather inclined to be mulish when he was not in a good humor; and though he was usually the best-natured fellow in the world, yet his patience came as near to giving out that day as it ever came. Madelon had persistently snubbed him all the morning, and he was not at all in a mood to welcome her advice, especially when it was offered in such an ungracious manner.

He disappeared from our sight, and presently we heard him raise a shout of triumph, and all rushing to look over the precipice, we saw him standing among the blue flowers on that narrow rocky shelf below us, a dizzy depth. He took the hat and tied it to his arm; then he bent over and

gathered a handful of the rare blue flowers, and placed them in his vest pocket.

At that moment a shadow fell upon the ground beside him; a shadow that sent a deathly chill to my heart; and with a horrified gasp I looked up, to see Charley Harrington standing on the very edge of the precipice, his face turned heedlessly away, and his feet almost over the brink!

Ralph Descartes looked up to us, and waved his hand, with a cheer that changed to a cry of horror as he saw. There was an echoing cry from above, a sudden start, a plunge—and Charley Harrington was lying at his feet, face downward, as motionless and silent as the rock.

There was a moment of awful silence; then Ivy Leversee threw up her hands with a wild gesture of despair, but without a sound, and sank insensible to the earth. Ralph, bending over Charley's prostrate form, looked up to us, and shouted for a rope.

Ireneo ran for the long stout rope which wise Farmer Hobson always kept beneath his wagon-seat. The farmer came back with him, and together they lowered the rope; and when Ralph had slipped a noose under Charley's arms, they carefully drew him up. It was a blessing now that the steep face of the rock was so unbroken. Then they lowered again for Ralph; after such a shock, the strongest nerves could hardly be fit for such a task as the scaling of that cliff. As he stepped among us, he turned an anxious look upon Charley, and casting away the rope, he came forward, exclaiming:

"He is alive; I felt his heart beat!"

Rosaleen and I were kneeling beside Charley, as he lay unconscious on the grass, while Madelon was trying to revive poor Ivy. As Ralph spoke those words, Ivy moved suddenly and attempted to rise, murmuring in faint imploring accents:

"Madelon! what was it Ralph Descartes said?"

"He says Charley is not killed, dear."

"Is it true?"

"Yes, Ivy," said I, turning toward her, for Charley was showing signs of life; "he is living; I do not think he is very badly hurt."

"Thank God!" cried Ivy, fervently; and she started up and came to Charley's side.

He lay there with his death-white face upturned, and his brown curls all gray with

dust, and clotted with the blood that came from a wound upon his head; and I thought how like to this had been his look when I watched him lying in the moonlight the night before! As Ivy approached, his lips moved convulsively; and slowly opening his eyes, it was her face that he saw bent above him, and her falling tears that wet his brow.

A faint flush tinged his pallid face, and in a hesitating tone he uttered her name:

"Ivy!"

"Charley! Charley! don't die; you *must* live!" wailed Ivy, wringing her hands.

The flush deepened on his brow, and his voice grew stronger, as he slowly answered:

"I shall live, Ivy—for *you*!"

Ivy stooped suddenly and kissed his lips. Her face was scarlet when she lifted it, and she cast a frightened glance at Rosaleen, as if it had just occurred to her recollection that Charley was hardly free to pledge his life to *her*.

Rosaleen, like myself, had witnessed the scene with astonishment, but she certainly made no display of indignation. On the contrary, I even fancied that there was a look of relief in her pretty face, as she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, and a slightly curling lip:

"I congratulate you, Ivy dear!"

Ivy bit her lip, but she said nothing; and at this juncture, Ralph Descartes, who had watched the episode in open-mouthed amazement, sensibly proposed that we should get Charley home as speedily as possible.

They went to lift him up, when he declared that he could walk; he was badly bruised, and the wound upon his head was no trifle, but his limbs were all sound. It was a marvel that they were not all broken. They helped him to rise, but the moment he stood upon his feet he turned white and dizzy; and, after all, he had to be almost carried to the wagon, Ralph and Ireneo supporting him on either side. He reclined upon the back seat, with his wounded head resting on Ivy's lap, and so we drove slowly home. Ralph forgot all about Ivy's rescued hat, and rode home with it dangling from his arm, and Ivy never remembered to ask for it.

When we reached the house, Charley went to bed, and Ireneo went for the doctor. Ivy went to her own room, and we saw her no more that day. I sat with Charley until

the doctor came. As for the others, they went to the dining-room and had lunch. Madelon and Rosaleen were sitting on the shady veranda when Ralph came out to tell them lunch was ready; and as I passed by the open door, going up to Charley's room, I heard Rosaleen laughingly call his attention to the hat that still hung upon his arm, its bright ribbons swaying as he walked.

He laughed, too, at his own forgetfulness, and detached it from his coatsleeve, exclaiming as he did so:

"That reminds me of those flowers!"

Putting his hand inside his vest, he drew forth the bunch of pale blue blossoms that he had gathered on the cliff. They were frail things at the best, and they were withered and crumpled now, from lying so long in his pocket; and he looked at them dubiously, as he murmured:

"Pshaw! they are worthless now."

He had intended them for Madelon, I knew, but she paid no attention to the wistful look he gave her; and with a sigh, he tossed the flowers away. Rosaleen sprang up and caught them, exclaiming:

"O, don't discard them yet, Mr. Descartes. I dare say they will revive if they are put in water."

"Try it, then, if you care for them," replied Ralph, indifferently; and Rosaleen took them with her to the dining-room.

What is that about hearts caught in the rebound? I thought of it as I went on up the stairs. Rosaleen was jilted, and Ralph was likely to be. What if she caught his heart as she had caught the cast-off blossoms?

The doctor came, saw Charley, and said there was some danger of a fever in consequence of the wound upon his head; but with care the danger would be averted, and he might be about again in a few days. He must be kept quiet, and amused, but not excited.

So, during the week that followed, my time was chiefly passed in Charley's sick room. Ireneo also devoted hours of each day to him, and Ivy came every day to bring him some little offering, such as fresh flowers or wild strawberries. No wonder that he steadily got better, and never showed the slightest inclination to fever.

At the end of a week the doctor made his morning visit, and announced that Charley might be permitted to go down stairs next day.

About half an hour later, as Charley, in dressing-gown and slippers, sat in his easy-chair near the open window, while I sat by him with my sewing, Ivy and Ireneo came in together. They had heard the doctor's announcement, and commenced at once to tender their congratulations.

"And here is something for you," observed Ireneo, producing a little white paper parcel and handing it to Charley. "Miss Sheldon requested me to bring it up," he explained.

Charley's face reddened as he unfolded the white paper, and the sunlight flashed upon the green glittering gem—the emerald engagement ring which he had given to Rosaleen! He looked at it for some moments in embarrassed silence, uneasily turning it over and over; but at the last the look of perplexity left his countenance, though he was very grave as he turned suddenly to Ivy, and without a word extended the ring toward her.

"Charley! you mean—" faltered Ivy, and there she stopped, with her questioning eyes upon his face.

Charley still held out the ring.

"Will you have it, Ivy?" he asked.

I had not supposed that anything of this sort could disturb Ivy Leversee's equanimity, she was so perfectly at home with a love affair. But she acted in this emergency just as any other girl might have done. She blushed, and looked half pleased and half frightened, and at last she hesitatingly held out her hand. The instant Charley had slipped the ring upon her finger, she turned and ran out of the room.

The next morning, when Charley came down to the drawing-room, looking yet a little pale and "interesting," but almost himself again, we were all prepared to give him a most enthusiastic welcome back into our midst; all save Ivy, who had obstinately refused to come down from her room.

Charley looked a little nervous as Rosaleen came forward with the others; but her frankly self-possessed manner soon put him at ease. She gave him her hand, in congratulating him, as readily as if there had never been anything more than common friendship between them; and I don't think there had, really. The engagement was one of those mistakes which so many young people fall into, fancying themselves in love, when it is only a mutual liking. It

was well that they had discovered the mistake, which might have ended so disastrously in a marriage which would have made them both unhappy for life.

At dinner, Ivy Leversee appeared, looking wonderfully quiet and subdued for her, and astonished us all by announcing that she was going home to-morrow.

"O Ivy! what for?" cried Rosaleen, in accents of dismay. "You shall not go! Just when we are having such a good time. Just when we are going to have a *better time!*" she added, with emphasis.

"Do you think so, Rosaleen? Then I *won't* go!" And Ivy walked around to Rosaleen's side of the table and kissed her, while the tears stood in her eyes.

It was nice and sensible of Rosaleen; I kissed her myself, the first chance I got, I was so pleased at her not displaying any dog-in-the-manger-ish spirit.

It happened, that evening, that Charley and Ivy were left alone together, while the rest of us went off into the garden. I suppose we all manoeuvred for it. Of course we knew that they were dying to have an explanation; and Charley was not in a condition to stroll away with her into the fields, or down to the summer-house. And though—as the reader has perceived—our party was a very confidential party, and not much given to secret understandings, still it is not pleasant to *do one's love-making* in the presence of half a dozen people. So we mutually contrived to leave them alone.

I am always hearing things; and it was quite in the usual order that I should overhear a little bit of the long conversation which I have no doubt took place between these two. It was rather chilly out in the garden, and I wanted my shawl. Ralph offered to get it for me, but I did not think he could find it. Then Madelon proposed to go, but she was arranging a bouquet, and had her lap full of flowers, and I would not allow her to disturb herself. I went for the shawl myself; and as I passed the half-open door of the parlor, where Charley and Ivy were sitting, I heard her say, in a tone of mischievous curiosity:

"But, Charley—why *wouldn't* you be jealous of Ireneo de Rivas, when I took so much pains—"

"You little flirt!" interrupted Charley, laughing; "you ought to have tried Descartes!"

"Why so?" she queried.

"Because I know that Ireneo's heart belongs to Madelon Eastlake," Charley answered.

"And doesn't Ralph's, I should like to know?" demanded Ivy.

"Perhaps—but mine did not belong to Rosaleen."

"Do you mean that it is the same with Ralph?" asked Ivy.

"I do not know," said Charley; "but I am afraid not."

"You are *afraid* not!"

"Because," explained Charley, "he will never marry her; the less he cares for her, the better for him."

"Why will he never marry her?"

"Because Ireneo de Rivas came up here expressly to cut him out."

"Well, Mr. De Rivas is a formidable rival," said Ivy, mischievously.

"I'm not afraid of him!" Charley answered, coolly. "Too late to make me jealous now, little coquette!"

I had stopped, at the mention of Madelon's name, and stood listening, quite forgetful of propriety; but the turn which the conversation seemed likely to take recalled my wandering sense of honor, and I gave myself a mental slap, and hurried up stairs; but I am afraid I was more edified than conscience-smitten.

It was true, then, that I had suspected; Ireneo *did* intend to rival Ralph Descartes, and I wished him all success! I never fully understood how it was that Madelon came to engage herself to Ralph, and I do not fully understand it now. She was not a mercenary girl, and though I could see what a temptation to one who had always lived in straitened circumstances, was the opportunity to become a millionaire's wife,—yet I could not believe that she had thought only of his money. It may have been a fit of pique that led her to accept him, for I believed her heart was interested in Ireneo de Rivas, and there was a coolness between them at that time. It had arisen I know not how; but while it was yet unreconciled, Ireneo had been obliged to go away, and when he had returned Madelon was engaged to Ralph Descartes.

Ralph was a model *fiancee*, and quite as devoted as any one could desire; but I had often thought it a wonder that he did not get discouraged, for Madelon certainly did not treat him with any display of affection. She was very polite and pleasant to him,

but she never gave him any encouragement to be "spooney;" altogether, they were another undemonstrative couple.

When I had found my shawl and, having wrapped it around me, returned to the garden where I had left the young people, I found only Rosaleen and Ralph.

"Where is Madelon?" I asked; and Rosaleen replied:

"O, she and Mr. De Rivas have gone after brier roses. She took a fancy to have some in her bouquet, and so he has gone to show her where he got those that he gave her, the other day."

"Did he give them to her?" asked Ralph, slowly.

"Didn't you know? O yes; Ireneo de Rivas is always finding something nice," smiled Rosaleen.

Ralph bit his lips uneasily. After a little he said, with a very apparent effort to seem interested:

"And you think brier roses are very nice; are you fond of them?"

"Yes indeed! who is not? But then they are not my *favorite* flower, as they are Madelon's."

"What is your favorite flower?" the young man inquired.

"O, I don't know," hesitated Rosaleen. "Violets used to be, but now—I should say those blue flowers that you got on the cliff, that day! What are they, do you know?"

"I forget the botanical name, but it is an Alpine plant," answered Ralph, who had been abroad. "In Switzerland, the villagers call it by a name signifying *hope*. I can't imagine how it should come to grow upon the Litchfield rocks."

"How poetical!" cried Rosaleen. "That is my favorite flower, henceforth and forever,—the Flower of Hope!"

"I fear you will not often get them," Ralph suggested, with a smile.

"Unless I find a cavalier as gallant as yourself," answered Rosaleen, and then she blushed.

"In return for that compliment, I shall make a point of getting some for your birthday present to-morrow;"—for the next day was Rosaleen's birthday, as she had duly informed us at breakfast.

"Not not for worlds!" she cried, in dismay, as Ralph made this proposition. "It is too dangerous."

"Pooh!" said Ralph, scornfully. "I have done it once, and I can do it again."

Rosaleen turned pale.

"For Heaven's sake, do not think of it!" she exclaimed. "You might fall, if you were to try it again."

"I'll risk it," said Ralph, lightly.

Rosaleen, really frightened, looked appealingly at me, and I observed, with severity:

"If you really intend to be so foolish, Ralph Descartes, I suppose nothing that I can say will dissuade you. But you will be very fortunate if you escape with your life a second time."

"And besides," said Rosaleen, "I have those flowers yet; I will consider them a birthday gift."

"You have them yet? Why they were quite withered," said Ralph.

"But I revived them with a few drops of ammonia in water," she returned. "They pressed beautifully, and I have put them in my album. I will show them to you to-morrow."

We sat there and talked in a desultory fashion, until it grew quite late, but Madelon and Ireneo did not return; and at last I proposed that we should wait for them no longer, but go into the house and leave them to follow when they would. Ralph rose at once, and we went in, although I thought Rosaleen was a little reluctant. When we came to the house, we lingered on the veranda for a few moments, and then Rosaleen and I bade Ralph good-night, and prepared to retire to our rooms. As we turned to leave him, Ralph stopped me.

"Miss Penelope—"

"Yes, Ralph?"

"Will you take one more turn in the garden, please? I want to speak with you."

"Certainly;" and I slipped my hand through his arm, and walked beside him down the garden walk.

He seemed in no hurry to speak. In gloomy silence he strode along, until we reached the foot of the garden, and further progress was stopped by the evergreen hedge which formed its boundary. I was wondering how long Ralph would have walked on in this way, if nothing had stopped him, when he led me to a rustic seat in the shadow of the hedge, and abruptly invited me to sit down.

I complied, remarking, in a tone of gentle reminder:

"What did you wish to say, Ralph? It is very late, you know."

"I want to ask you one question," he

said, and I thought I knew what was coming.

I was not mistaken. When I bade him ask his question, he looked me full in the eye, and demanded:

"Miss Penelope, do you think Madelon is dissatisfied with her engagement? Do you think that—that she prefers Ireneo de Rivas to me?"

He stammered over the last question, and I could plainly see his reddening brow, as he stood before me in the moonlight, and propounded this humiliating query. What could I say? I looked at him blankly, debating with myself whether I should tell him what I really did believe; and I had not yet decided the question, when we heard the sound of footsteps approaching on the other side of the hedge; and directly arose the voices of Madelon and Ireneo de Rivas, in conversation.

The garden gate was quite near to where we sat, and as they entered through it and stood there together, we could both see and hear them plainly. I was getting up to approach them, when Ralph laid his hand upon my arm.

"Hush!" he whispered, peremptorily; and I sunk back in silence.

"Madelon!" said Ireneo, in accents of passionate entreaty. "Madelon, do not turn me off in this way! I love you, Madelon! You know I love you!"

"Ireneo, stop! do not say any more!" exclaimed Madelon, wildly. "Let me go in—"

"No!" he interrupted. "You shall not leave me until you have answered me. I believe you love me, Madelon!"

"God help me, I do!" sobbed Madelon.

"My darling! I knew it!" and Ireneo made a movement as if he would have taken her to his heart.

"Ireneo! you forget!—I am betrothed to another;" said Madelon, shrinking away from him, and extending her hand, upon which glittered Ralph Descartes's diamond.

"Madelon, you shall not marry Ralph Descartes!" uttered Ireneo, fiercely.

"I have promised, Ireneo. I cannot break my word."

"Will you rather break your heart and mine?" he demanded.

She made no answer. She dropped her face into her hands, and moaned as if her heart would break indeed; and Ralph moved suddenly, and took a step forward. But he

checked himself when Ireneo cried out, impetuously:

"Madelon, I will not ask you why you ever suffered Ralph Descartes to place that ring upon your finger. Whatever your motive was, it was a mistake. But that mistake may yet be remedied. Let me take off that ring, before it is too late!"

Madelon looked up, and put her hand behind her with a frightened motion, as she faltered:

"No, no! it is too late now, Ireneo. I will be true to Ralph. It is not his fault that I do not love him. He trusted me when he placed that ring upon my finger, and no one else shall take it off!"

Before Ireneo could speak again, Ralph Descartes strode forward and stood before them, I following by his side. Madelon uttered a low cry, and a burning blush suffused her face; but Ireneo faced Ralph with a boldly defiant look.

Ralph regarded him for a moment with close-shut teeth and sternly frowning brow. Then his angry aspect changed, and with a half-sad, half-bitter smile, he remarked:

"There is no occasion for such a defiant attitude, De Rivas. I have not come to call you to account, Madelon!"

He turned to Madelon, as he spoke her name, and she met his eyes with a wondering look. The blushes had vanished from her face, and she was very pale—and very lovely. I saw how the lines of pain deepened about Ralph's handsome weak mouth, and how they gave it a strength and a firmness which suffering, perhaps, could impart to his character, and my heart was wrung with a sudden pang of grief for him, though I had never liked him so well as at that moment.

"I have been listening, Madelon," he said, gently, "and I have heard only what I suspected before. Dear girl, you do not love me, but you hold me as a friend at least?"

"O yes, Ralph! yes!" cried Madelon.

"Then let me prove my friendship by giving you back what I have no right—and no desire—to keep; your freedom."

"Ralph! I do not ask it," murmured Madelon, and her voice was choked with tears. "I will keep my promise, Ralph! I will try to love you as you deserve."

He answered, gently:

"Ah, Madelon, the love that comes for trying would never satisfy me. Better to

resign you now, and know that you are happy, than hold you to your promise, and bring misery to both our lives. Will you give me your hand?"

He held out his own, and she laid her right hand in his palm.

"Not that," he said; "the other one," and she gave him the left.

His lip quivered, as he clasped her slender fingers, but he bravely went on.

"Madelon, this is good-by. I want you to believe that, though I know full well what I am losing, yet I make the sacrifice cheerfully for your sake, and that I shall come, in time—soon, I hope—to feel as you would wish me to—about this."

His brave voice faltered just a little, and Madelon began to sob.

"Forgive me, Ralph—"

"With all my heart," he answered, warmly. "But I shall not forget you, Madelon, my friend."

Then he lifted her hand and drew off the diamond ring from her finger, saying in a low tone:

"There, Madelon, you are free."

He held the ring irresolutely for a moment; then, endeavoring to smile, he spoke again.

"Perhaps I may some day offer such a ring to another girl, but I want you to keep this one. Will you still wear it, Madelon—on some other finger?"

Madelon took the ring and slipped it on her right hand.

"I shall value it now more than I did before, Ralph," she said, with deep emotion.

Ralph smiled, quite cheerfully, as he responded:

"I think you will value me more, too, Madelon. And now, good-night—and good-by."

He raised her hand to his lips; and then, turning to Ireneo, he frankly offered his hand.

"Good-by, De Rivas. I wish you well."

Ireneo wrung his hand, but he did not speak. The mist that dimmed his black eyes showed why.

And Ralph quietly gave me his arm, and walked back to the house. As we parted at the door, he asked:

"Have I done well, Miss Penelope?"

I choked up at that, but I managed to blubber out:

"Nobly, Ralph; and I hope you will yet be as happy as you deserve to be."

"I mean to be, Miss Penelope," said Ralph, looking every inch a man. "I don't intend to play the lovesick fool."

And people dared to say that Ralph Descartes wanted brains! I had thought myself that he was nothing but a good-natured nobody, whose money made him of consequence. I was pretty sure my favorite, Ireneo, would have "played the lovesick fool" to perfection, had *his* been the unfortunate love. I admired Ralph so much, and felt so sorry to think how I had undervalued him, that I did not know how to express my sentiments in words. And so—I may as well confess it—I kissed him! Why not? I had kissed Rosaleen for doing just what he had done; and I was old enough to be his mother!

It strikes me now, though it did not at the time, how much Rosaleen and Ralph are alike. Neither of them very brilliant, but both of them true, and good, and honest to the heart's core; and as for good sense, I wish the other young people of whom I have written may show as much during the whole course of their lives, as these two displayed at that time. They are well fitted to make each other happy, and rumor says, lately, that there is a probability of their doing so.

I cannot certify to the truth of that, for I do not often see them now; but I must say I think it very likely. He *did* get those blue flowers for Rosaleen, and presented them at breakfast-time, on the morning of her birthday; and Rosaleen cried with distress at the thought of the danger he had incurred for the second time. That was the last time they met, that summer, for Ralph went away that afternoon. But they live in the same city, and when Rosaleen went home in September, she saw him again. That was two years ago, and a wounded heart may recover in much less time than two years.

Ireneo and Madelon are married; and so are Charley and Ivy.

THE CURSE OF CARNIGIE.

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

[NO. 1.—COMPLETE IN FOUR NUMBERS.]

CHAPTER I.

Twilight was coming softly down upon the little English village of Woodstock,—that long and tender twilight, which, in lands beyond the sea, is often the only part of the whole day that seems well worth the living. The one stony, uneven street of the village echoed no longer with the tread of careless visitors from Oxford, and the clatter of their steeds; the fair assistants in the glovers' shops had packed away their tawny-colored wares; and the one stationer, who sold the prints of Blenheim Palace and Fair Rosamond's Well, was putting up his shutters before he went to smoke his usual evening pipe at the "Bear" across the way.

All was still and silent, and the shadows came softly down alike over humble cottage and lordly hall. The moon rose slowly in a sky of pearly gray, bathing the lonely park in a mild and tender radiance, inexpressibly soothing to a worn and wearied soul. It was a night to sadden with its beauty a heart grown old before its time; but it was also a night to fill with eager rapture the spirit of a lover,—and one, at least, was drinking in its beauty, as he waited for the coming of another, beside Fair Rosamond's Well:

Far off, across the park, glowed and glittered the thousand lights of the stately palace which was a nation's gift to John, Duke of Marlborough, a nation's offering of gratitude to one of her best and bravest sons. The grandson who had succeeded him was holding high revel there, and the proudest sons and daughters of England were aiding their noble host to celebrate, in a fitting manner, the birthday of his heir. All day long there had been rejoicings in the park and grounds, to which the villagers had been freely admitted; but the woodland was silent now, except for the strains of ball-room music softly sounding from afar, and

Rosamond's Well gleamed darkly in the moonlight, undisturbed by voice or footfall save his own.

He stood there, leaning against the iron railing, beating time with one hand to the distant music, while his eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon the placid sky. By his attire and stately grace of bearing, he was evidently one of the duke's guests; and, as he made an *impatient movement from the well*, the moonlight flashed upon a star of diamonds embedded in the hilt of his sword, and a corresponding star and pendant suspended from his breast. Evidently the wearer was a man of high degree. His face was dark and proud, regularly featured, not exactly handsome, yet winning the beholder's eye by the expression of melancholy that seemed to linger round it like a cloud. His eyes were large and dark and deep, with an expression that reminded one of the look of Charles the First,—a look said to be seen only in the eyes of those who are doomed to die a sudden and violent death. He wore a drooping mustache, and his long hair fell in curls almost to his shoulders, making his resemblance to the martyred king still more striking. In age he was apparently about thirty-five; in bearing, stately and majestic; in manner, reserved, quiet, and somewhat proud.

As he turned away from the well a light footfall among the trees fell upon his ear, and the next moment a fair, slight girl, apparently not more than seventeen years of age, stood before him. She was a thorough Saxon beauty, with a complexion of clear red and white, large blue eyes, and hair of golden brown; but there was a singular delicacy of expression in her lovely face that seemed to contrast but strangely with the humble russet gown she wore. She did not see the cavalier at first, but stood in the shade of a gigantic Cedar of Lebanon drawing her cloak more closely around her, and

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looking toward the distant palace with an expectant yet half-frightened air.

"Gabrielle!"

She started, as she heard that voice, bounded forward, and was clasped in her lover's arms.

"Little laggard," he said playfully, when the first fond greeting was over; "here have I been waiting for your coming a good half-hour or more. What kept you so long, my pretty one?"

"My father was later on his rounds than usual, and I dared not come till he was gone. And my grandmother was wakeful. I had to read more than one chapter before she fell asleep; and" —

Her hand, straying lightly over his broad breast toward his shoulder, came in contact with the jeweled order he wore. She started back, looked at him keenly, with a glance that took in every detail of his rich and elegant dress, and then stood before him like one suddenly struck dumb.

"Finish your sentence, my pretty Gabrielle," he said, with a smile.

"I—I cannot. What does this mean, Francis? Whose dress is this?"

"My own, love."

"Yours?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And this sword?"

"Mine also."

"And that?"

She pointed to the glittering order.

"Mine, Gabrielle. A king placed that on my breast with his own hand."

"A king! Then you are a nobleman."

"I am."

"And not a keeper's son; not my" —

"Not your Francis! Eh, pretty one? I was never more yours than at this moment. So prithee come here again; and do not look so shy. I scarcely know my little Gabrielle when she looks like that."

He would have thrown his arm around her; but she drew herself beyond his reach. Her face was very pale; but her glance was calm and steady.

"My lord, was it well in you to deceive a poor girl like this? to mock me? to" —

Her voice trembled; but she bit her lip, and would not give way to her tears.

"Mock you, Gabrielle! I have deceived you, it is true; but no thought of mocking you or trifling with you ever entered my mind. Will you not believe me? I only wanted to be loved for myself alone; and so

I wooed you as the keeper's son, and not as" —

He hesitated.

"Let me hear your real name now, at least, my lord," she said calmly.

"Francis Carnigie," he said, looking at her with a dubious expression on his face.

She grew paler yet.

"Carnigie of Carnigie! The earl!" she faltered. "I have had a narrow escape, indeed! But I owe you thanks, my lord, for telling me before it was too late. Take them, — and farewell."

She turned away; but he sprang forward, and seized both her hands.

"Gabrielle, are you mad? Will you leave me like this, simply because I tell you the truth at last? By Heaven! I have given you my whole heart, and you have not an atom of faith in me!"

She struggled to release her hands; but he would not let her go.

"Gabrielle, why are you so changed? You loved Francis Hunter: can you not love Francis Carnigie as well?"

"No, my lord."

"Why?"

"Ah, do not hold me, — let me go!" she pleaded. "You know too well why I must not stay with you. You know as well as I why Carnigie of Carnigie is a name that every honest maiden fears. I have heard of you, my lord, over and over again; and I know" —

"Is that all, Gabrielle? Are you going to send me from you for a few idle tales?"

"They were true, my lord."

"And if I grant that, — if I confess to those few youthful follies, — will you not forgive me?"

"My lord, they were not only sins of your youth which I have heard. They were crimes of your manhood as well, and you must ask God's forgiveness of them, not mine."

"Here 's a saintly ladye-love with a vengeance," he muttered to himself, in vexation; as he released her. Then smoothing his brow, he said, aloud, "Gabrielle, I should be quite as wicked as you believe me to be, if I affected to misunderstand your meaning. It is only too plain, — I wish from my very heart that it were not. But listen to me for one moment, and then if you insist on going, I will not detain you. Will you stay?"

"Yes," she answered sadly.

And he went on more hopefully than before.

"I have lived, as you know, a lawless and godless life. I have been true to none, I have been false to many. But I am no longer young, my pretty Gabrielle. My hair is turning silver, my heart is growing old; the time has come when I have to pause and reflect upon the years that are passed, and the years that still lie before me. I hope to spend them differently; that is, I *had* hoped so. But I reckoned on your aid, my Gabrielle, to make me a good and happy man. If you refuse it, Heaven only knows what my career may be."

He paused. But she did not look at him. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, and her hands were clasped nervously together. Yet she listened to him, and that was one great point gained.

"I came to you as a poor, humble man," he went on, with an added softness in his voice, "because you were a child of the people, and I feared what has happened here tonight, — that if I told you my real name and rank, you would shrink from me. I made you love me as Francis Hunter: I ask you now not to forsake me simply because I am rich and noble. Take me with all my faults, — in spite of them, — and with your influence as — I will not say my countess, but my wife, dear Gabrielle, who knows how great a change may be worked in me?"

Gabrielle's cheek flushed deeply, and she raised her eyes timidly to his. Much as she had loved Francis Hunter, often as he had told her that his heart was all her own, he had never asked her plainly to be his wife. Ascribing this to his poverty rather than to his want of inclination, she had waited patiently and hopefully, till he was ready to ask her that question to which so sweet an answer would be given.

Now, grand and noble as he had suddenly turned out to be, he was still true and honorable with her, still ready to raise her from the humble sphere she occupied, to share his lordly home. Ought she then to doubt his sincerity, when he spoke of that amendment in his life, which under her gentle teachings he was willing and anxious to make? Ought she not to give him credit for so laudable an intention, and help him to carry it out so far as it lay in her power?

He read her altered feelings in her eyes,

and, coming nearer, took her hand once more.

"Gabrielle, answer me one thing. Have I ever failed in any way in the respect I owe you?"

"Never, my lord."

"Have I ever uttered one word that could offend your ear, ever ventured upon a look too bold? Have I not, though your lover, been always as careful of your honor as your brother might have been? We have often been together in these green shades for hours together, but never has my speech transgressed the limit of propriety. Is not this true, my fair and gentle love?"

"It is, my lord."

"Can you not trust me, then? Can you not believe that if I had always met with maidens pure as you, I might have been a better man. Judge me as harshly as you choose, my Gabrielle, but remember that maidens are sometimes themselves to blame, as well as those who work them harm."

There was truth in what he said. She was forced to own it, in spite of herself; for in more than one case of which the story had been told, she remembered that if he had wooed eagerly, the maiden had been far too ready to be won. And so, as his arm stole softly round her waist once more, she did not repulse him, but drooped her head gently till it rested on his breast, and burst into tears.

"My darling, do not weep," he said, softly. "You will break my heart; I never can bear to see those sweet eyes dimmed with tears. Look up, my love, — my wife, — and tell me that I am forgiven."

"O Francis! if you will only be true to me, I can forgive you all," she murmured.

"My sweetest, nothing can ever make me false to you. Dry those eyes now, and let these tears be the last that Francis Carnegie will ever make you shed."

Gabrielle sighed, as she leaned upon his shoulder, and looked down into Rosamond's Well.

"I have sometimes thought our trysting place was one of evil omen," she said. "If aught of ill should befall me, I should attribute it to this place."

"Why, love?"

"Fair Rosamond trusted a king, even as I am trusting you."

"Well."

"And see how she was rewarded."

"But Henry loved her to the last, you must remember. It was Eleanor, the jealous queen, who worked all of that trouble, not the faithless king."

"And is there — will there be no Eleanor in this case?" she asked with a smile, yet with a certain anxiety in her tone and manner that could not escape his notice.

"How can there be one, love, when my heart is entirely given to you?"

"But you see so many grand and beautiful ladies, — so far above me. How could you choose me from among them all?" she asked.

"Because you are the sweetest and dearest little wild flower of the woods these eyes ever beheld," was the rapturous reply, as he clasped her in his arms. "Gabrielle, you must consent to one thing."

"What is that?"

"Be my wife soon."

"I cannot," she answered. "My grandmother is old and feeble. She will not live many months, and I promised my mother on her dying bed that I would never leave her."

He was silent for a little while, looking over the golden head that rested on his breast, into the deep underwood, and smiling evilly. But when she glanced up into his face to see if he was offended, it was very calm and grave.

"You are right in obeying your mother, my love," he said slowly; "but can we not reconcile these two things? Marry me as privately as you like, only marry me at once, and begin the good work which you have promised to undertake. You need not acknowledge it as yet; you need not leave your father's home to take your place as Countess of Carnigie, till your relative has passed away. Though I would like her to know before she dies that you have the right to bear that name," he added musingly.

It was a strange proposal that he was making; but his last sentence, above all others, stamped it with such an air of truth, that Gabrielle would have felt ashamed of herself if she had doubted him. It would not be well, of course, for the Countess of Carnigie, publicly acknowledged as such, to watch beside the dying bed of the keeper's mother: there was a manifest unfitness in the thing, in spite of the claims of nature and the tie of blood. But the wife of Francis Carnigie, legally yet privately wedded,

might well abjure her state for a time, and pay those fond attentions which would come so willingly and gracefully from the hand of no other.

She said this hesitatingly, and the earl, enraptured at his unexpected success, thanked her again and again, and vowed, with countless oaths, that she should never repent the trust she had reposed in him. He had dreaded refusal, expostulation and tears. This ready and sensible compliance charmed him beyond measure, and when the lovers parted, it was with promises and protestations on his part, that a woman so young and innocent must have found it indeed hard to disbelieve.

With one last, fond kiss they separated at last, just as the great clock upon the palace tower tolled out the hour of nine. The earl sauntered slowly up through the verdant glades and over the swelling slopes of that lovely park, and after glancing critically at himself for a moment, in the mirror of his dressing-room, and making some slight changes in his attire, he descended to the ball-room, where, for the rest of the night, he played the part of a gallant and devoted cavalier to many a fair lady, but most of all to one on whose proud head rested, in her own right, the coronet of one of the noblest houses in the Welsh principality.

Meanwhile the keeper's daughter went toward her humble home, glad and grateful at the thought that even the startling discovery of the evening had not awakened her rudely from her dream of love, — proud to believe that her promised husband would not yield her up; nay, that he knew, all the time while she was in ignorance, the great difference in their station, and loved her all the same.

She paused for a few moments, as her father's cottage came in sight, and wiped some happy tears from her eyes. Never had that little home looked half so dear as now! The rustic porch was overhung with honeysuckle, and the sweet, wild odor of the trumpet-shaped blossoms came to meet her where she stood. Through the diamond panes of the latticed window, the light of the house candle shone clear and bright, like a beacon to guide her steps. She could see her grandmother's spinning-wheel, that stood by the arm-chair, she could see her father's guns and fishing-rods hanging on the white-washed wall; but the room was empty, and congratulating herself that her

ab-ence had been unobserved, she hurried forward, and opened the door.

The room was empty? No! Some one had been sitting near the hearth, just out of the range of her view, and at her entrance the stranger rose up to greet her. A tall and handsome young man only a year or two older than herself, wearing the everyday dress of a mechanic, and bearing a letter of recommendation not to be mistaken in the upright carriage, and bronzed, healthy face, and the straightforward, honest gaze of his dark blue eyes. His hair was brown and curling, his teeth white as snow, and displayed by the kind smile that lit his whole face when he saw her, and though the hand he held out was more used to the axe, the saw and the rule, than to kid gloves and jeweled canes, its possessor was as true and firm as steel, and none knew it better than Gabrielle Monturue.

Flushed with her walk, and with the deep emotions called up by the interview with her lover, she stood in the centre of the room, eying her visitor with such a startled air, that he dropped her hand in some alarm.

"What ails you, Gabrielle? You look frightened. Did you get startled in the park?"

"No. I—I have not been walking far," she stammered, laying aside her hat, and sitting down in her grandmother's chair. "Did you want to see father about anything, Mr. Weston?"

"Not before I have seen you, Gabrielle, — and perhaps not at all, — that depends on how you take what I am going to say," replied the young man nervously.

"Sit down, Mr. Weston," said Gabrielle, little dreaming what she was about to hear. "I am sure father or I would be very happy to do anything in the world for you."

"Would you? Are you quite sure of that? O Gabrielle, can't you guess what it is I want to say to you?"

"I am sure I cannot," she began; but looking up at him, the color began to rise from cheek to brow. The secret lying at her own heart taught her how to read the depths of his, and she could no longer say with truth that she was ignorant of his meaning.

"Yes, Gabrielle, I love you," he said, with simple dignity. "I am very young, it is true, but I have a good place and a pretty home to take you to, and I really believe

your father would give his consent if you could find it in your heart to like me. What do you say, Gabrielle?"

She listened with half-averted head, feeling sorry for the pain she must so soon inflict, yet unable, with all her compassion, to help contrasting this rough, plain wooing with the more refined and courtly words to which she had been listening that evening, — the humble future offered, with the proud distinction already in her grasp. But her voice and look were very gentle, almost humble, as she declined the offer.

The young man flushed up, — then turned very pale.

"Gabrielle! you cannot mean that you will never marry me. Don't say that; if you do, I shall be ruined for life. What shall I care for my place or my cottage, if you are not there? And I have been pleasing myself all the spring with making it pretty and pleasant for you. Think it over, Gabrielle."

She shook her head.

"Martin, if I thought it over forever, my answer would be the same."

"Why?"

"A woman ought to love her husband better than any one else on earth. I do not love you so."

"You would learn to, in time."

"No. I will not deceive you in the least. You are very good and kind, Martin, but" —

"I see," he said, bitterly. "You were always above your station, Gabrielle, and I am not fine enough for you. But think you. Which is best? To be the loved and honored wife of a man like me, who would work cheerfully all day long to make you happy and comfortable, or the cast-off toy of one of those proud lords up at the castle, whose hands are soft and white, while their hearts are as hard as stone."

A red flush rose to Gabrielle's cheek.

"Why do you talk to me of them? What have they to do with me?"

"Much, perhaps, if all that is told be true. But you will be angry with me if I say it."

"Speak out."

"Well, — if you must know, the house-keeper saw you talking with one of them the other night in the park, and she bade me tell you that no good could come of it."

"Dame Margot is very kind," said Gabrielle bitterly.

"She said it kindly, my lass. And only to me because she knew I loved you dearly, and would rather die than see a single hair of your head injured. But she was right enough, Dame Margot was. They 're a wicked set, those lords up yonder, and there 's one wickedder than them all, bad as they are."

"Who is that?"

"They call him Lord Carnigie, and he is a Scotch earl, I believe. I 've heard the serving-men tell tales of him that would make your blood run cold,—tales not fit for you to hear, though, my lass. And I wish with all my heart that you would marry me, Gabrielle, and come away from here. 'T is no place for one so pretty, with all those wild sparks about."

"My father can take care of me," said Gabrielle coldly; and he little dreamed that the vexation so plainly visible in her look and manner was to be attributed to his careless mention of Lord Carnigie's name.

"Then you refuse my offer?" he said sadly.

"I must. Do not talk to me about such things in future, Martin, if you have any regard for me. Be my kind, good friend, as you have always been, and you shall have my friendship in return. But I have no heart to give you."

"But, Gabrielle"—

"Hush!" she said gently. "I hear my father's step outside the door. Do not let him know what we have been talking about. It might grieve him, and I should be sorry to do that, but I cannot change. I am weary now,—I did not sleep much last night,—so perhaps you will excuse me, Martin, if I go to my room, and leave you to talk with him." And without waiting to hear more, she took the candle as soon as her father came in, said good-night, and went to her chamber.

But the yellow moon was high in the heavens before the music from the palace ceased to sound, or the many lights along its stately front began to die away. Not till the last one was extinguished, leaving the long façade in perfect darkness, did Gabrielle seek her pillow, and lie down to dream, not of Martin Weston, but of the earl.

CHAPTER II.

A week passed by, and old Mrs. Monturue, rallying from the disease which was

slowly sapping the foundations of her life, was able to sit in the sunshine at the cottage door once more, and attend to the household duties of the little place, while Gabrielle worked busily with bobbins and cushions, making thread lace for the grand ladies who were stopping at the palace. One or two of them, attracted by the fame of her rare skill in this accomplishment, had already been down to see her, and had given their orders in person, and praised the neatness and dexterity with which she executed them. Daintily dressed, soft-voiced and fair-faced women they were,—but all married, and Gabrielle's heart was the lighter for her knowledge of the fact. Her lover was in less danger when surrounded by them, than he would have been amid a circle of gay young girls. At least, so *she* thought, and was happy in the thinking.

Seven long, weary days and nights had passed since they had parted, and in all that time not one word from or a glimpse of him. In old times, when they had met in Huntingdonshire, she had been the pretty dairy-maid on a large farm, and he had passed as a keeper's son from a neighboring county, in search of some rare breed of hounds. Then a low whistle at the farm-yard gate, just as the moon rose in the west, had been the signal to summon her to his side, but all was changed now. She was no longer a servant among strangers, and their meetings since his arrival at Woodstock had been far less frequent, and always marked, on his part, by a singular embarrassment and fear of discovery, which had puzzled her sadly, but which she could account for now. Had his rank been still unknown, she would have sought the trysting-place of her own accord, as she had done before; but now that she knew him, not as a servant at the palace, but as one of its noblest guests, she would not take a step which might appear forward and presuming in his eyes. He had said that he loved her, and had asked her to be his wife: it was his place to ask for an interview, not hers to force it upon him.

She was thinking of these things one sunny afternoon, as she sat in the vine-shaded porch, working at a new pattern which had occurred to her only that morning. All was peculiarly still and peaceful around her. It was at that hour of the day when Nature herself seems to yield to a short repose, and only

the subdued twittering of a bird from the tall trees over her head broke the quiet of the scene. The blossoms of the honey-suckle hung all around her, a cluster of white pinks stood in a glass upon the porch bench, and she was bending over her work, trying with deftly moving fingers to imitate their forms if not their hues, when a shadow fell athwart the entrance, and a low, musical voice said,—

"A perfect picture, upon my word! I only wish I had my sketch-book here."

She looked up.

A lady stood there, wearing a riding-habit of olive green, with a red rosebud at her breast, and the plumes of her hat just tipped with crimson. She was tall and stately, with a magnificently developed bust and sloping shoulders; her eyes were large and gray, her hair and eyelashes black as jet; her features straight and proud; her complexion of a creamy paleness, except for the vivid crimson on lip and cheek. She was apparently about thirty years of age, and everything about her, even to the jeweled handle of her riding-whip, and the ruby button that fastened her glove, bespoke wealth, and the exquisite taste which can only direct its use aright.

Gabrielle rose from her seat, courtesying and blushing deeply.

"I am sorry to disturb you," the lady said. "You have no idea how pretty you looked, as you sat there. But since you are disturbed, may I venture to ask you for a glass of milk, or, if you keep no cow, of water?"

"We have a cow, my lady, and I will bring you some milk at once. Will you sit here in the porch, or come into the house?"

"In the porch, by all means. There, I have roused your grandmother out of a sound sleep. What a shame!"

Mrs. Monturne looked up, bewildered at the brilliant vision, but the lady would not let her rise to do her reverence.

"Sit still, ma'am. I am sorry I waked you. But I have been riding a long way in the heat, and left my horse at the park gate, and came down here to get some milk. Thank you, my dear, and I will drink to your good health, and your heart's best desire, whatever that may be," she added, with a smile, as she took the glass of milk from Gabrielle's hand.

"And now will you let me see you work a little? Your cushion puts me in mind of

home. In Wales the people make lace like this. I have some that is very beautiful, made by the tenants' daughters on my estate. Perhaps you will have time to add to my stock before I leave Blenheim."

In Wales, and at Blenheim! This then was the great heiress of whom they had heard so much; the countess in her own right, who, it was said, would never marry, since she had wealth and rank of her own, and liked her independence better than any nobleman she had ever seen. Gabrielle gazed at her very wistfully as she sat down in the porch to take a lesson in lace-making.

It had not lasted long, before the park gate at the end of the garden shut with a heavy clang, and a gentleman came hastily down the narrow path. Gabrielle's heart stood still for a moment with fear and amazement. It was the Earl of Carnigie, wearing a riding-dress of silver gray, and booted and spurred.

Frightened and trembling, she bent before him as he reached the porch. He bowed to her with grave courtesy, then turned to the countess with a look of reproach.

"Your ladyship has given us all a fine fright," he observed. "From the pace at which you rode when you left us, we feared an accident, and when the groom and I found your horse in the park just now, I felt sure that you had been thrown, and that they had brought you here."

"My ladyship regrets very much that you should have put yourself to the trouble of coming to see," was the saucy reply. "You must make my excuses to the rest of the party, my lord. Tell them I am learning how to make myself useful by making lace, —there's a good man."

A frown and a smile struggled together on Lord Carnigie's face.

"Will you not come with me?" he asked, in a lower tone.

"I am tired of them all, my lord."

"And of me?"

"Perhaps."

"Only one thing remains for me, then."

"What?"

"To drown myself as speedily as possible."

"Fair Rosamond's Well is very near," was her laughing reply.

"And you sentence me to it?"

"Nay, rather than that you should make

good for fishes at your tender years, I will go with you. Where is the duchess?"

"In the park, by this time."

"Was *she* frightened?"

"Very much."

"I need not ask about the duke, because, as we all know, he is devoted to me, and my danger must have perfectly paralyzed him."

Lord Carnigie laughed. Between the young countess and the duke, one of those hereditary dislikes existed, which will sometimes mark a family as distinctly as their name could do. The Earls of Apwyth and the Dukes of Marlborough had always been foes, and even the conventionalities of fashionable society could scarcely conceal the antipathy which existed between the present representatives of the two races.

"Yes, the duke would have been insoluble if I had broken my neck with the help of his hunter," she went on. "For my part, it seems almost cruel to disappoint him, as I shall soon have to do. Had you not better leave me here, my lord, and let him think that I have vanished into air? I can make lace the while" —

"Nonsense!" said the earl, taking the bobbin from her hand. "You must really come with me, Lady Gwendoline, and at once."

She looked at him a moment, as if considering whether she should obey or not, and then rose.

"You see what a tyrant I have set over me," she said with a smile to Gabrielle. "But I mean to learn your pretty trade, for all that, and next week, when some of the people up yonder go away," — she emphasized the sentence with a gay nod toward the earl, as if she alluded to him, — "next week, if you will take me for a pupil, I shall certainly come down here, and stay all day long, and help you get dinner, and tidy up the house afterward, as well."

"Your ladyship will be most welcome," said Gabrielle, but in so faint a voice that the countess turned and looked at her again.

"You poor child!" she said, "we are wearying you to death. You look white as a ghost. Come, my lord: take charge of me, and I will finish this visit some other day."

He offered his arm, bowed gravely to Gabrielle, and escorted the lady down the path.

Gabrielle gazed after them with aching heart and overflowing eyes.

This, then, was the end of all her dreaming! It was this lady, with her beautiful face, her bewildering smile, her rank, her goodness, her gayety, and her wealth, who was to be the earl's bride. Not the forest-keeper's daughter, who had been rash and mad enough to dream once of such a thing. Oh, fool and doubly blind that she had been! How could she have trusted and believed him so! She buried her face in her hands, for the scalding tears began to flow. But a step on the garden path startled her. Lord Carnigie had returned, and was standing by her side, looking perplexed and uneasy to the last degree.

"My dearest, I have only time to say one word," he murmured, under his breath. "I could not speak to you while she was here; and what evil wind blew her this way, Heaven only knows. I was never so startled in my life as when I saw her sitting beside you. Gabrielle! you do not answer me."

"My lord," she said, looking up at him through her tears, "if your words have blinded me to my own folly a long while, I see it only too plainly now."

"What can you mean?"

"That she will be your bride, not I."

He bit his lip with vexation.

"I feared you would get some such nonsense into your head, Gabrielle; and so I made an errand back to look for my glove. I have no time to convince you now of your mistake; but I swear that it is one. Lady Gwendoline is nothing to me more than a friend."

Gabrielle shook her head.

"She will be, my lord," persisted the girl.

"Bairn! The sky may fall, you know; but it is a most unlikely thing. But a truce to this joking, my love. Will you be at the well tonight, say by eight o'clock?"

"No, my lord."

"Gabrielle, do not drive me quite mad. I feel as if it would take very little to do so. I have far more to annoy me than you can dream of."

And he brushed the hair back from his forehead with such a look of care and weariness that her heart softened toward him at once.

"I will come," she said.

"That is my own Gabrielle."

"Hush! my grandmother is in the cottage."

"One may not steal a kiss, then?"

"No."

"It is a penance; but I will make amends for it tonight."

"My lord, I will come to the well" —

"Yes."

"But it will only be to say farewell."

"What!"

"I shall never see you again, my lord, after tonight."

"Tut! Be punctual, my pretty one. Yes, this is the glove; and I am sorry to have

troubled you. Adieu, Miss Gabrielle: adieu, madame."

He lifted his hat, and departed; and Gabrielle, turning in some confusion, saw her grandmother standing upon the threshold of the cottage door. How much or how little of his parting speech she had heard, she could not guess; for the old woman made no allusion to it, though once or twice, as they talked of him and the countess, her grandmother's eyes were fixed upon her face with a look so penetrating that it made her blush and turn her confused eyes in another direction.



THE CURSE OF CARNIGIE.

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

[NO. 2.-- COMPLETE IN FOUR NUMBERS.]

CHAPTER III.

It seemed to Gabrielle that the long summer day never would come to an end. The birds, roused from their short siesta, sang gayly in the sunshine, and her white kitten went frisking down the garden path after their swift-flying shadows, but the heart of the young girl lay heavy in her breast, and the pretty pattern in which she was taking so much pride grew into such a mass of confusion beneath her trembling fingers, that she pushed it pettishly aside, and said she would work no more.

Her grandmother eyed her nervously, as she sat by the latticed window with her knitting in her hand. At last she said, —

"Gabrielle, come here."

Gabrielle came, and took the low chair she pointed out.

"Well, grandmother."

"Do you remember asking me about the locket you found the other day in my drawer?"

"With the picture, and the curl of yellow hair?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to tell me the story now?" asked the girl, settling herself with a look of pleasant anticipation.

"Yes, better now, perhaps, than many a day hence when it will be too late. That locket, my dear, was given to me when I was very young, and almost as pretty as you are now."

"Far prettier, I am sure."

"My child, when the Lord makes a face like yours, he puts eyes into it to see its own beauty, I am thinking. You know well that you are pretty, my dear, just as I knew it at your age. But I really think that you are prettier than I was, and I only hope you may be wiser too."

The old lady sighed, and laid down her knitting.

"Gabrielle, the man that gave me that picture had one of the fairest, falsest faces I ever saw. You know how handsome he was, — or rather you don't know, for the portrait does not do him justice. He said he loved me, and I was silly enough to believe him, and to hope that some day I should be his wife. I was a little fool, my dear, for he was far above me in birth and everything, but he had a flattering tongue, and I believed all he said to me."

"Well, grandmother, how did it all end?" said Gabrielle, feeling more than a little guilty.

"As you might have expected, and yet better than I had any reason to hope for, since I found him out before it was too late. I had bought my wedding-dress. It was of India muslin, and partly made up, when he came to me, and tried to persuade me to elope with him."

Gabrielle blushed.

"What did you say, grandmother?"

"At first I said no, but at last I said yes," was the reply, and the young girl looked as she felt, perfectly astonished. For no matter what wild vagaries our own hot, eager youth may lead us into, nothing seems half so strange to us, nothing is so hard to realize, as the fact that the same wild current has danced and leaped in the veins of those around us, whose heads we have always seen frosted over by the hand of time.

"And you ran away with him?"

"Not exactly. I made all my preparations; I even got out of my chamber window, and went across the fields, — then my courage failed me. I ran back, crept into my little bed, and cried till morning."

"And did you see him the next day?"

"I never saw him again."

"O grandmother!"

"He went up to London on the next night, and in a week's time we heard that he was married to a great city heiress. He

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had been engaged to her for more than a year, and never had the slightest intention of keeping the promises he had made to me. So you see it was very well for me that I went back."

"Yes, indeed," said Gabrielle sadly. And after a slight pause, she added, in a low voice, "Was it very hard to bear?"

"For a time, my dear, I really thought my heart was broken. But only for a time, thank God! The pain soon went, and I was a happy wife and mother many a year, before I ever looked at that picture again, I kept it always, though, not because I loved him,—that all went when I found him out,—but because I wanted it to remind me of all I had escaped, and all I had found."

She was silent, but she looked in the girl's face with a penetrating glance for a moment or two.

"Gabrielle, beauty is a great snare," she said kindly. "Those who have it have many a temptation and heartache with it, that other women little dream of. If I saw a young girl led astray by the gift, or by the admiration it might suit some people to show for it, what should I say to her?"

"How should I know?"

"I should tell her the story I have just told you, and bid her remember that in nine cases out of ten the love of a gentleman for a girl beneath him in rank can only be a delusion and a snare. I should tell her to shun the words of flattery that are spoken in her ear alone; above all, I should tell her to fly from him who urged her to keep her love for him a secret from those who knew her best."

Gabrielle's head drooped low on her clasped hands. The grandmother's words pointed so directly to what she was herself thinking and feeling, that she saw her secret was in a manner discovered. Should she confide in her altogether, and ask her advice? How could she, when it would so evidently be directly against the cherished wish of her heart?

"Have you anything to say to me, Gabrielle?"

"No."

"No?"

Her grandmother seemed surprised and disappointed.

"Have I told you that story in vain? You have no mother; whom should you consult, if not me?"

"It is not that, dear grandmother. I see that you guess something of my secret, and by tomorrow I dare say I shall tell you all. Only let me think it over first. It is all so strange and sudden that I feel bewildered."

"Very well. Talk to me when you like, but remember my words. And may God bless and guard you, my child."

Gabrielle stole softly from the little room, and went out into the garden. A gnarled and twisted apple-tree stood there, and one of its projecting limbs had been her favorite seat from childhood. She sat down on it now. A root of honeysuckle planted by her hand on her sixth birthday had climbed around the trunk, garlanding it with a wreath of green leaves and flame-colored blossoms. She gathered the mass in her folded arms, and laid her flushed face down amid the coolness, and the greenness, and the sweetness. She never inhaled that subtle, delicious perfume again, without a thought of that sunset hour and the earl.

She sat there until the evening shadows began to steal up the western sky. Her grandmother did not summon her till her father's arrival, and after tea was over, and the house place made neat and clean, she stole away to her own room to brush out her curls, and make some slight changes in her attire, before she met her lover in the park. At a quarter to eight she came downstairs, looking fair and fresh as a daisy, in her gypsy hat and blue muslin dress and mantle.

"I shall only be away a little while, grandmother," she said. "And perhaps when I come back, I shall be able to tell you all you wish to know."

"God keep you, child!" was the old woman's only reply, and Gabrielle passed lightly out at the garden gate.

Rosamond's Well lay still and silent beneath the crimson sky when she got there, but no lover awaited her. With a thrill of uneasiness, she remembered that eight o'clock was the dinner hour at the palace, and feared the earl had forgotten it when he named that time. She must wait patiently till he could join her, that was all.

But just as the castle clock began to strike the hour, a heavy step came crashing through the underwood, and he was by her side. His face was very pale, and he looked stern and anxious, scarcely greeting her even with a smile.

"Come with me, my dear," he said

briefly. "Do not stop to ask questions, but be as reasonable as you can, and follow me at once."

He strode away again at a great pace, and she followed, half frightened and half offended. Ten minutes of such rapid walking brought them to a disused lodge, beyond which two great gates opened into a lonely road. A close carriage, drawn by a pair of swift horses, stood here, and the earl's own confidential servant touched his hat, and opened the door as they approached.

"But what is all this?—I don't understand," said Gabrielle, shrinking back as Lord Carnigie attempted to take her hand.

"Listen to me," he said, in hoarse and agitated voice. "Obstacles which were unexpected, and which are quite beyond my control, have arisen to my marriage with you. Unless we fly at once, you can never be my wife,—I cannot and will not give you up. So I have made these preparations. Before we are missed we shall be far on our way to London,—tomorrow morning early we shall be married, and the devil himself cannot undo it then," he muttered, between his teeth. "Will you go?"

"I cannot, my lord. My grandmother"—

"You shall return to her very soon, and tell her all. Gabrielle, don't trifle with me. I have been driven almost desperate by the thought of losing you. Come, love, you must go,—by heaven, you shall never repent it!"

He half led, half drew her into the carriage.

"Drive on, William, like lightning," he said exultantly; and he sprang in after her, just in time to save her from falling, as the carriage rolled away.

Long ere she had recovered from that deathly swoon they were many miles from Woodstock, and there was no hope of her return.

CHAPTER IV.

On the same night at eleven o'clock, the travelers reached a little hamlet, at some distance from Oxford, and turning down and then away from its main street, stopped before a wall as high, though by no means as long, as that of the palace grounds.

Gabrielle roused herself from a long, painful reverie, and looked out with keen interest. The earl had been silent during the greater part of their rapid journey, and the few words he had addressed to her had been

spoken as if his mind was very far away. It was one of the strangest elopements,—not at all like those of which we read in romances, and as she gazed at him, sitting stern and silent in his own corner, her heart sank drearily, and she did not venture to address him.

He leaned by her with a muttered apology, and looked out of the window.

"Humph!" he said, as if something he saw displeased him.

The servant opened the door.

"Shall I ring, my lord?"

"No,—I have the key."

He alighted as he spoke, and held out his hand to Gabrielle. Weeping silently, and overpowered with fear and anguish, she let him lift her from the carriage.

He led her to the high gate, unlocked it, and they stood in an avenue of pines, whose dark branches drooped bodingly above her,—whose odorous fragrance rose like incense upon the cool night air.

A deep-toned bell began to toll the hour, and as they wound along the avenue, she saw a building, dark with ivy, just before them. By the faint light which streamed through the open door, she saw a flight of rounded steps, and a square hall paved with black and white marble, just beyond, but she could not conjecture what kind of a place it was, nor did any human being appear to offer her a welcome.

"Thank Heaven, here he is!" said the earl, aloud; and as he spoke, she saw a white-robed figure cross the open space. In an instant she was hurried up the steps, and across the hall.

A gothic arch, shrouded by a crimson curtain, was just before them. The curtain was drawn aside from within, and Gabrielle saw a little chapel, dimly lighted by a high candelabra, with a clergyman in full robes awaiting them at the altar.

She gasped for breath, and clung to her lover's arm for support. This explained his silence, his apparent coldness during their journey. He would address no word of love to her, when once entirely in his power, till he addressed them to *his wife!* Was ever such delicacy, such kindness, known? Her heart was full; and had he asked from her at that moment the sacrifice of her very life, she would have deemed it all inadequate for payment of such a boon!

"Come, my love, we must not keep the clergyman waiting," he said in a softer tone

than he had used toward her that night, and he drew her before the altar, while the first words of the solemn marriage-service fell upon her ear. She had listened to it many a time before, in the little village church at Woodstock, but not as now, with her very heart and soul; never had she hoped, at least of late, to make those fearful responses as she made them now, with heart as well as lip, — never had she dared to dream of hearing them from that gallant noble at her side, who uttered them as firmly and proudly as if she, too, had been the descendant of a long, princely line.

It was over at last, and she, not the bright and beautiful Lady Gwendoline, was the bride of the Earl of Carnigie!

She could scarcely believe the evidence of her own senses, as she leaned upon her husband's arm, and turned away, the wedding-ring glittering brightly on her finger, the peace and ecstasy of newly wedded love filling her heart so full, that she felt as if she must give way to tears.

"You must allow me to wish your ladyship joy," said a low, musical voice behind her, and turning with a start, at the sound of her new title, Gabrielle saw the clergyman divested of his robes, and holding out his hand with a pleasant smile.

He was a tall, elegant man, of about thirty-five, and bore so strong a resemblance to the earl, that she looked from one to the other in mute surprise.

"Even the countess notices the resemblance, you see," said the clergyman, with a slight smile; and the earl frowned.

"Ah, Campbell is a second cousin of mine, Gabrielle," he said briefly.

"On the father's side," said the young man.

"Yes, on the father's side," and the earl's brow grew darker than before.

"They often take us for brothers, your ladyship," said the clergyman, smiling again.

"Come, Gabrielle, the air of this church strikes cold, and you must be tired," said the earl, drawing her away.

"A fair good night, and a long and happy life to your ladyship," said the clergyman, bowing low over the hand he still held; and Gabrielle, wondering what the secret difference between the two could be, was led away.

A vaulted aisle, long, dark and chilly, led from the chapel to the house connected

with it. At its end, lights flashed brightly upon them, and they entered a large and spacious saloon, brilliantly lighted, paved with marble, and decorated everywhere with fresh and beautiful flowers.

A tall, good-looking woman of forty, or thereabouts, dressed as a housekeeper, was in waiting and advanced to meet them with respectful courtesy. But the earl waved her aside.

"My good Mrs. Mason, the countess accepts your greeting, but she is almost tired to death, and I am fainting with hunger. Is supper prepared?"

"All is ready, my lord."

As the woman spoke, the doors of an inner apartment flew open, and Gabrielle saw a stately dining-room, and a table bright with glass and silver. Two carved, velvet chairs were placed at the upper end of the board, where a solemn-looking domestic of middle age already waited.

Beyond the dining-room, and only separated from it by curtains of velvet, now drawn aside, was a long suite of apartments, furnished in a style of stately magnificence that made the young girl's heart die within her. Even the rooms at the palace were not more beautiful than these. She scarcely dared to enter them, and when the earl would have seated her at the banquet, where all the dainties of the season tempted the eye and taste, upon their silver dishes, she shrank back timidly. Even the ceremony through which she had just passed failed to give her confidence enough to forget the difference in their ranks. She, who by birth was only the fitting companion of her husband's servants, could not, just at first, raise herself to his level; she who had eaten coarse morsels off delf and earthen dishes, and drank the cool water from the mountain spring from horns of pewter, could not summon courage to taste those dainty cates, or quaff the sparkling wine from goblets that blushed with the hue of the ruby, and were brilliant with gold and precious stones.

The earl looked surprised for an instant, as her trembling hand dropped from his arm. Then, with that rare discernment of feeling and motives, which was one of his greatest and most dangerous gifts, he guessed the cause of her hesitation, and hastened to allay her fears.

"My darling, are you too tired to bear me company here?" he whispered. "If so, you shall go to your own apartments, and

Mrs. Mason shall attend you there. I will send up your supper with my own hands; and you must not refuse the morsel I prepare. Shall this be so?"

"Yes," she said faintly. "I feel both tired and ill. You will pardon my going, my lord?"

"Pardon it? Is not your health my most precious care now? I am your humble slave; your servant. Whatever you command, I have only to obey. Mason," he added, aloud, "the countess is too much fatigued to sup here. Attend her to her room; and remember, Mason, that I rely upon you to make her eat something—though it be ever so little—of the supper I shall send to her."

"I will do my best, my lord."

"Your best? Nay, Gabrielle, if you are naughty, and refuse to eat, we have dungeons under this house, modern as it looks; so beware! Adieu for a little time, my sweetest! Mason will take the best of care of you; and I shall pledge you in every glass of wine I lift to my lips this night."

He led her to the door, kissed her hand as he resigned her to the housekeeper's charge, and stood looking after them till they were out of sight.

"Faith, many a countess would give her eyes for such a face and form, such a stately, springing walk!" he said to himself. "She will do, she will do, after a few months' training, and a season in Paris, just to 'gild the refined gold, and paint the lily.' And now for supper. These love affairs make me wondrous hungry, after all."

Ten minutes afterward, the grave manservant knocked at Gabrielle's door, and, with the help of Mrs. Mason, arranged a tempting repast upon the little table before the sofa on which she reclined. There was a covered silver dish that sent forth a most delicious smell, a cold bird, fruit wrapped in its own leaves, and piled high upon a silver salver, and a long, slender-necked bottle, with its seal removed, and its golden goblet, wreathed with a vine of rubies, amethysts, and emeralds at its side. The man retired, with noiseless steps, and Mrs. Mason filled the goblet, while a delicious aroma spread over the whole room, and held it toward her new mistress.

"If you will only drink this, my lady," she said respectfully, "you will be able to sit up and eat. My lord will blame me, if you eat nothing."

Worn out with fatigue and excitement, and feverish from thirst, Gabrielle took the cool goblet from her hand, and drained it to the dregs. Her strength and color returned in a few moments, and she sat upright, and looked at her attendant with a smile.

"Your prescription was a good one," she said. "That draught has done me a world of good."

Mason removed the covers, and stood waiting respectfully.

"Pray sit down," said Gabrielle, after a moment's pause. "I cannot bear to see you stand; in fact, I will not eat any supper if you do. Besides, I wish you to talk with me; and you are not at your ease now. Take that cushioned arm-chair, just to oblige me: lean your head back, and look comfortable, while I ask you all the questions to which I am dying to get an answer."

Mrs. Mason obeyed, after a little hesitation, with an inward smile at the young girl's simplicity, and an inward prayer that the earl might not catch her in that position. Meanwhile, Gabrielle went on with her meal with an air of the most perfect enjoyment.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked at last, as she pushed away her plate.

"Eh, my lady?" repeated Mrs. Mason, as if doubting whether she heard aright.

Gabrielle repeated the question.

"How should I know, my lady, except that you are the countess, and the mistress here?"

Gabrielle was silent for a moment, while her eyes were fixed upon the woman's face.

"You are not saying what you think," she observed, at last.

"My lady?"

"One thing has convinced me that you know."

"May I ask what that is?" said the housekeeper; but she blushed guiltily, as if she knew what her mistress meant.

"I was convinced when you sat down," said Gabrielle, with a little laugh. "Nay, don't be foolish, — keep your chair."

"But, my lady" —

"Sit still, I say, my dear creature. I do not object to your knowing at all. It only saves me the trouble of telling you. And, since I am in reality of your own class, I am going to beg of you to look upon me exactly as you would if I were a daughter of your own, and tell me all I ought to do and say."

"I do not know how to be a countess; and, only that I love my husband dearly, I would wish already that I had not married an earl. Oh, if he were only a keeper's son, as he first pretended to be, if we only had some little cottage, instead of this grand house, if I could only wait upon him, and look after his comforts, instead of having a great many servants to minister to me, how happily we might live together!"

She was leaning her head upon her hand, and talking as if to herself. The house-keeper rose from her chair, and stood gazing at her, while wonder and pity seemed struggling together in her heart.

"If you feel like this," she said slowly, "I ought to tell you; and I *will*, let what may come of it."

The words died upon her lips, for the door was thrown suddenly open, and the earl entered. He cast a sharp, suspicious glance upon the agitated face of the house-keeper.

"Mrs. Mason, have you prepared everything that the countess requires?" he asked, in a harsh voice.

"I have, my lord, in the other room, but" —

"Then go."

She lingered a moment, looking toward Gabrielle, who in her turn was looking with some surprise at the dark countenance of her husband.

"My lord," began the woman —

"Will you go?" he said sternly.

And he pointed toward the door.

She dared not disobey him, but left the room with a heavy sigh. He closed and locked the door behind her.

"That woman grows officious and impertinent," he said gloomily. "I shall have to discharge her ere long. Have you been gossiping with her, Gabrielle?"

"I have been talking to her."

"I could have sworn it. And so she presumes upon your kindness, and grows familiar at once. This will never do. If you do not keep that class of people at a distance, they will never have any respect for you."

Gabrielle was silent, but the flush of wounded feeling dyed her cheek.

"You do not answer," he said.

"How can I, my lord, when I can but remember that I by birth am one of that class of people for whom you seem to have such a contempt?"

He bit his lip angrily.

"Gabrielle, once for all, do not fall into that folly of thinking that I refer to you when I say things of this kind. You cannot help your birth, — neither can they; but you may be said, in one sense of the word, to have left your birth behind you forever, now. You are no longer the keeper's daughter, — you are" —

He stopped short.

"Pshaw, love! Why do you take offence at every word I utter? I may say ten thousand things like this; but surely you cannot for one moment imagine that they apply to you. Are you not a queen to me, — queen of my heart, — even though I have no real throne to offer you? Smile on me, Gabrielle, and remember that this is our bridal night."

"Ah, my lord," she sighed, as he bent above her, "will you never be ashamed of that lowly birth of mine?"

"Never! I swear it by yonder star. Come, Gabrielle, do not let the folly of an old woman breed discord between us now. Give me your hand. Let me look at your wedding-ring. There: let this kiss make amends, if I have said or done anything wrong. And put your arms around me, my darling, and rest your pretty head upon my shoulder. Call me by name: you have called me only by my title, so far. Give me my name, — nay, rather give me my new name: call me your own dear husband, and I will be content."

Gabrielle blushed at the unfamiliar sound, but did as he desired; and side by side the married lovers sat and talked, with the beauty and the silence of the moonlit midnight hour around them.

The breeze of the early morning was stealing through the half-closed casement, laden with the wilesome song of a hundred happy birds. The turret-clock struck three as Gabrielle opened her eyes.

For one moment she looked dreamily around, expecting to see the sloping roof and rough rustic furniture of her little room at home. But as her gaze encountered the costly trifles that littered the toilet-stand, as she saw the velvet chairs, emblazoned with a coronet, and the gilded Cupids that held aside the curtains of the bed, sense and memory returned together, and she knew thoroughly where she was.

The earl slept quietly, and she, too, was

turning drowsily toward her pillows once more, when a movement in the outer room startled her. She rose upon her elbow, and looked out through the half-open door.

A woman was walking to and fro, with clasped hands, and long hair that fell in half-curling tresses of intense blackness almost to her feet; a woman tall beyond the usual stature of her sex, magnificently proportioned, and with a face of Oriental beauty, dimmed and faded, however, by sorrow and by tears.

Three times she paced slowly through the open door, and then, pausing at the entrance, she looked at Gabrielle with eyes that seemed to pierce her to the soul; large, black, and bright as stars, but cold and gloomy in expression, and with something in their depths that was more than mortal. It was a look such as a lost and ruined spirit might lift out of the depths of torment to a soul in bliss; and Gabrielle shuddered from head to foot as she met it.

"Who are you?" she asked, in a faltering voice.

The woman wrung her hands with a despairing gesture, and then floated slowly backward with a different motion, as if her feet were not touching the floor. So slowly did the vision recede, that Gabrielle had time to stamp the face and figure distinctly upon her memory, even to the pattern of the lace upon the flowing robe; lace which—she remarked with a thrill of horror—was the same as that which decked the robes prepared for her in that splendid chamber only a few hours before. Slowly, slowly the figure faded away; and when it was entirely gone, Gabrielle sank back upon her pillows in a swoon of terror.

When she recovered, she saw the earl, wrapped in his dressing-gown, bending over her, while Mrs. Mason was rubbing her hands and temples with pungent essences, and weeping bitterly.

"What is it, my love? Do you feel ill? What made you cry out so, and then faint away?" asked the earl anxiously.

"Oh, the woman! the woman!" she gasped. "Is she gone?"

And, leaning by him, she looked into the outer room.

"What woman?"

"Dressed in white, with long, black hair. She stood and looked at me in yonder door."

The earl turned pale, and exchanged a glance with the housekeeper.

"My love, you have been dreaming."

"No: I saw her as plainly as I see you now. Oh, it was terrible!"

And she shuddered, and closed her eyes.

The earl mused a moment.

"Mrs. Mason, you will remain here with her," he said, at last. "I will dress, and then your husband and I will search the house. If any living woman is here, we shall find her; and we are very certain that no dead woman can come to scare us with her presence. So go to sleep, my pretty Gabrielle, and meet me at breakfast with a smiling face."

He went into his dressing-room, as he spoke, and shut the door. Mrs. Mason was obstinately silent on the subject of the apparition; and Gabrielle, weary of asking questions to which she could obtain no satisfactory answer, sank to sleep at last, keeping a firm hold upon the housekeeper's hand the while.

THE CURSE OF CARNIGIE. *

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

NO. 3. — COMPLETE IN FOUR NUMBERS.]

CHAPTER V.

Eager for a solution of the mystery of the preceding night, Gabrielle was about to speak of it the instant she met the earl at the breakfast-table; but a glance at his absent and pre-occupied face dispelled all idea of mentioning the subject from her mind.

He seemed greatly perplexed and annoyed; so much so, that he several times appeared to forget that she was present, and then apologized for his absent-mindedness with a courtesy that was perhaps even more wounding than his neglect.

The man-servant whom she had seen the night before waited at table, and when the meal was over, and he had left the room, the earl rose from his seat. Gabrielle rose also, and, more hurt at his strange manner than she chose to say, retreated to the window, and looked out upon the extensive and somewhat gloomy garden beneath, his eye following her with a peculiar gaze.

Following the instructions of Mrs. Mason, who had acted as her tiring-woman, she had laid aside her humble peasant's garb, and wore the dress which had been provided for her by the earl.

It was a morning-robe of pale-blue silk, confined at the slender waist with a cord and tassel of silver braid, and frilled at the neck and wrists with the finest lace. Her golden curls, most carefully arranged, hung almost to her waist, and were held back from her face by a ribbon of the same hue as her dress. Very sweet and pure and fair she looked, as she stood there with the light of the summer morning falling all around her, and many and conflicting were the thoughts of her lover, as he gazed upon the beautiful picture.

At last he went to her side, and, passing his arm around her waist, bent down and kissed her sunny curls.

"Gabrielle, I have scarcely given you a

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morning greeting yet. You must pardon me, my love. I have been nearly driven mad by some news that reached me after I left you this morning."

"Here?" said Gabrielle, with some surprise; for their flight had been so hurried, and so secret, that she thought their home was hidden from all the world outside the gates.

"Yes, here," was the absent reply. "Of course I did not leave Woodstock without making arrangements to hear from there, for your sake, and for my own. And this morning I have received a message."

He ceased to speak, but took both her hands in his. She turned very pale.

"What is it, my lord?"

"We are missed, my love. I must return at once."

"And leave me here?"

"Yes."

"Are you deserting me so soon, Francis?" she asked mournfully.

He frowned.

"Deserting you? What childish nonsense are you talking now? I go for your sake as well as my own. If I return at once, my story of a sudden journey to London on important business will be accepted, and your absence will seem to have no connection with my own. I will let you know the moment it is safe for you to return. In the mean time, I will see your father, and explain all to him. Do not look so sorrowful, my darling. Mrs. Mason will take the best of care of you; and my absence is but for a time, and a mere measure of prudence, after all."

He was right,—the poor girl knew and felt in her heart that he was right,—and yet all seemed so strange, so sad, that she had no words to express the feeling with which she looked upon this sudden, forced parting. It was like a bad omen, an evil beginning to their wedded life; and in spite of all her efforts to the contrary her tears began to fall.

The earl, like most of his sex, could never bear to see a woman cry, and his apparently genuine distress soon dried the bright shower. He vowed by sun and moon and stars to be forever true to her. He promised to tell her father the exact relation that existed between them, and said that if Gabrielle would but accede to his wishes, and keep their marriage a secret from all others but for a little time, it should at last be ac-

knowledged with as much publicity and splendor as the vainest woman's heart could desire. Not that his sweetest of Gabrielles was at all vain. Oh, no! He would rather perish than attribute so low and mean a feeling to her! And so on, *ad infinitum*, with a quantity of that nonsense which traitorous lovers have always been privileged to talk, but which it is the weariest work for those who are not in love to write, to hear of, or to read.

Gabrielle listened, and believed each word as she believed her Bible. Whatever Francis Carnegie might have been to other women who had trusted him too implicitly, to her he was all that was good and noble and true. The marriage ceremony that had passed between them in that little chapel was proof positive of this; and she had no fear of falsehood or treachery of a kind that could annul the vows she had spoken on the previous night.

Her only fear was for a more subtle and unconscious treachery,—the treachery of the heart! Now that he was all her own, she dreaded trusting him in the presence of the beautiful Lady Gwendoline too often or too much. He was the tenderest and most devoted of husbands, it was true; but absent from her, might not his eyes linger too long and too tenderly upon the face and form of another? Might he not pause to think, as Lady Gwendoline swept by in all the power of wealth and beauty, that but for Gabrielle she might have been his wife? Oh, anything, anything but that! Better death—sweet and precious as life was—than a long and lingering existence benumbed by the thought that, even for one moment, Francis Carnegie had regretted his romantic union with her.

Throwing her arms around his neck, she told him so, and then, in fear and trembling of his answer, hid her head upon his breast.

"Little goose!" he said playfully. "Do you suppose for one instant that a thought of Lady Gwendoline could enter my head while my heart is so full of you?"

"But she is rich and noble and beautiful," began Gabrielle; but he stopped her with a kiss.

"So is my little wife. Let us hear no more of Lady Gwendoline. Tell me, instead, how you shall employ the time while I am away."

"I have not seen the house yet, or the grounds."

"True. As for the grounds, you might almost cover them with a pocket-handkerchief. This garden which you see beneath us comprises them."

"It is large enough. Is it your own place?"

"And yours, my love. It is a complete old rookery,—and yet I like it. The place caught my eye some years ago, as I was traveling through Oxfordshire; and, finding it was for sale, I bought it. It makes a good shooting-box enough."

"Do you often live here?"

"Very seldom. My own home is in Scotland, you know. And, by the way, there is just the dearest little farm there on my estate: I wonder if your father would accept it from you as a wedding gift?"

"O my lord!"

"Tut! Call me Francis. Do you think he would like it?"

"I am sure he would. All his life long he has dreamed of owning a farm. But he has never dared to hope for it."

"Then his dream shall come true, Gabrielle, and I will speak to him about it the moment I return," he replied.

For all answer, she caressed the hand that held her own.

A stamping on the gravel-path below attracted her attention, and, looking down, she saw a horse saddled and bridled, and held by a groom.

"You are not going now?" she asked, with a piteous look.

"My love, I must. I have no choice, if your reputation is to be saved,—and you must wish that, as will as I. Don't weep, my pretty one, and cling to me so. You shall hear from me as soon as I can despatch a servant back to you from Woodstock. Come: let my last memory of my Gabrielle be a smiling, not a tearful, one."

She tried to do as he bade her; but her effort was a vain one.

"Dry those sweet eyes, and listen to me," he went on, more earnestly. "When I am away, see no one except Mason and her husband, and the servant whom I send. Will you promise this?"

"Who else should I see?" she asked wonderingly.

"My cousin, the clergyman who married us, may return to this house," he replied, with a troubled look. "His house is not far away; and he may take it into his impertinent head that a visit from him may be

acceptable in my absence. I beg—nay, I command you, Gabrielle, not to see him."

"I have no wish to," she replied, frightened by the vehement manner in which he spoke.

"That is well: I shall trust to your promise. Now, my love, here is the key to my library. The picture-gallery opens from it, and you will find a very fine piano there. Amuse yourself with that and the books till I return, and don't talk to Mason any more than you can help. Will you promise not to be lonely, and spoil those pretty eyes by crying, while I am gone?"

"I will do my best."

"No woman can well do more. And now, love, I must really go. I will see your father, and explain everything to him; and when I come back to you I hope to be the bearer of a pleasant message from him. Kiss me, love: think of me by night and by day, as I shall of you. Good-by."

He tore himself from her arms, and hurried from the room. She thought, but could not tell for a certainty, that his eyes were dim as he said farewell. Almost heart-broken, she went to the window again to see him mount his horse. He lifted his hat, and waved his hand, then galloped down the avenue, followed by his groom, and she was alone. It seemed almost as if the honeymoon, brief and strange as it had been, was entirely and forever over; and, throwing herself upon the couch, she let those tears flow without restraint that had been kept back by his presence hitherto.

She grew calmer, at last, and when Mrs. Mason entered at one o'clock with a tempting lunch, she was able to sit up, and do full justice to it. After the meal was over, she took up the two keys which the earl had given her.

"I am going to the library, Mrs. Mason," she said. "Will you attend me?"

"To the library!" replied Mrs. Mason, looking strangely confused. "Did my lord leave you the key? He always keeps it with him."

"Yes: I have it here, and the key of the picture-gallery as well. We will go there for a while, and see if we cannot pass over pleasantly some hours of this dull and dreary day."

She led the way out into the great hall, as she spoke; and Mrs. Mason was, from necessity, forced to act as her guide, till, after going through one or two arched passages,

they paused before a carved and massive door.

"This is the library," said the housekeeper.

And she stepped back behind her mistress, with a look of apprehension on her face.

The key turned easily in the lock, and the broad light of day sheened through the long, low room; its walls lined with books, its floor covered with a Turkey carpet of rich and glowing colors, its one great window of stained glass unshadowed by curtains or hangings of any kind. The furniture was rich, but heavy and massive; and the whole aspect of the place was that of a room devoted to study of the gravest kind. Gabrielle shrugged her shoulders, with a look of distaste, as she gazed around. There was little of the student in her composition; and those books, in their gravely covered and massive bindings, were by no means the companions she craved in her present state of mind.

"We will go a little further, Mrs. Mason," she observed. "Which way does the picture-gallery lie?"

"Here, my lady."

She raised a heavy curtain, that hung at the further end of the library, as she spoke; and Gabrielle passed forward with a feeling of infinite relief.

The gallery was circular, with a high, domed roof, and every panel was hung with a portrait or other picture, while marble statues were scattered here and there, and a handsome pianoforte, with its cover thrown back, as if some one had just been using it, stood at the further end.

Gabrielle sprang forward, with an exclamation of delight.

"Ah!" she said, "here is the only room I have seen as yet in the house that pleases me. Mrs. Mason, I shall often come here, and sit for hours, if—if my lord is long away."

"Yes, my lady," said the housekeeper respectfully.

But she looked ill at ease, and every faculty of her being seemed to be strained and on the watch.

Too full of her own pleasure to notice the woman's strange manner, Gabrielle walked up and down, looking at the pictures, not with a critical, but with a loving, eye.

"Lord help us all! I'm sure I don't know what to do!" muttered the housekeeper, as

she sank helplessly into an easy-chair. "If she gets the least inkling of the story, the whole thing will come out, and then I believe in my heart the earl will murder the three of us. He is quite wicked enough to do it, I— And, Lord save us! what was that?"

Gabrielle had paused at the lower end of the gallery, and seemed to be listening intently.

"Mrs. Mason, did you hear any one speak?" she asked.

"No, my lady."

"I thought I heard some one call my name. I thought I heard some one say, 'Lady Carnigie.'"

"Impossible, my lady, when there's only Mason and me in the house."

Gabrielle passed on. Presently, with an exclamation of wonder, she paused before one of the portraits.

"Yes,—now for it,—now it is coming," thought the housekeeper, walking down to where she stood, gazing, as swiftly as she could.

"Mrs. Mason?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Here is the exact portrait of the woman I saw in my room last night."

It was the picture of a dark Spanish beauty, dressed in black lace, wearing a crimson rose in her hair, and having a tame falcon perched upon her wrist. A bright, beautiful, bewildering face; of which the eyes seemed to follow you, the red lips to smile mockingly at you, if you went but a step away.

"Who was she?" asked Gabrielle.

"Who, my lady? Oh, one of the old earl's daughters, I believe. I have forgotten the story altogether."

The housekeeper was in such evident perturbation, that Gabrielle laughed, and shook her head.

"Are you really telling me a white fib, Mrs. Mason? There is a real story about this lady, I believe; and one of these days I shall make you relate it to me."

"One of these days I will, my lady," she replied; "but not here or now. Do you play?"

"A little."

"Will you not let me hear you, then, my lady?"

"Certainly."

She sat down before the piano, ran her fingers over the keys, and began to sing the

old Irish air of "Aileen Aroon." The housekeeper listened a few moments, with her eyes fixed upon the Spanish lady's portrait.

All was still, and she looked greatly relieved as the last notes of the song died away.

"Thank you, my lady," said she. "You have a very sweet voice, and I am sure my lord would" —

"Hush!" said Gabrielle, holding up her hand. "Listen!"

Somewhere near them, — one could hardly say if from above or below, — a lute was faintly sounding. Nearer and nearer came the sound, stronger and stronger grew the chords, and Mrs. Mason's face was as white as death.

The prelude ceased; and a deep, rich, contralto voice began to sing, — so close to Gabrielle, that she could distinguish every word of the song as plainly as if spoken in her very ear.

"Close to my dreaming heart
You stood that day:
The time of my life had come
To hear yea or nay.
I looked in your face:
But you turned it away;
And, if ever hope had lit my heart,
It died out that day.

"Years long and weary
Have passed since that day:
Love, hope, and happiness
Have faded away.
Your life is your life:
Go you your way.
My soul and your soul
Parted that day."

A finale of rich, throbbing chords, and all was silent.

"Mrs. Mason, you must know who this singer is, — in my husband's house!" said Gabrielle, turning to her with a searching look.

"O mercy! here it comes again," thought the unlucky housekeeper, wishing herself a thousand miles away.

"Am I to know the truth about this matter from you, or from the earl?" asked Gabrielle haughtily, and looking much displeased.

"My lady, you would never ask him," she said.

"It will be my first question on his re-

turn," said Gabrielle, "unless you answer me first."

The housekeeper was at her wits' end for answer.

"Well, my lady," she finally said, "I see it is useless for me to conceal it any longer; but I wish you" —

She stopped short, and looked with an air of the most unfeigned terror at the picture of the Spanish lady. Gabrielle's eyes followed hers. The picture was moving. Slowly it swung upon its hinges, revealing a large, square room beyond; and in the aperture formed by the removal stood a shape of horror, — a woman with a pale face, and with long, black hair streaming wildly over the loose and snowy robe she wore.

"The ghost!" uttered Gabrielle, in a dying tone. "The ghost of the bridal chamber!"

The figure waved its hand, as if commanding their departure, and seemed about to step down from the frame into the hall beside them.

Gabrielle, in terror, grasped the housekeeper's arm.

"Oh! how dreadful!" she exclaimed. "What shall we do?"

"Fly, my lady! fly at once! I told you a falsehood about that picture," whispered the housekeeper. "'T is 'the Curse of Carnigie,' and appears to the bride of every successive Earl of Carnigie upon her wedding-night."

Gabrielle waited to hear no more, but flew, at the top of her speed, through the gallery and library, and out into the hall. There she waited, breathless, till the housekeeper, who had followed her more slowly, appeared.

Her face was very pale and grave, as she locked the door of the library, and handed the keys to Gabrielle.

"Oh!" she said, with a shudder, "keep them, Mrs. Mason. I shall never want to open those doors again. Come to the drawing-room with me, and you shall tell me what it all means. I dare not be left alone in this fearful house a single moment. Why did the earl bring me here? I wish he would come back."

As if in answer to her speech, the heavy gallop of horses at full speed was heard in the court-yard; and, running to the window, Gabrielle saw the earl alighting from his horse, and giving orders to his groom

and serving-man, who had come out to meet him.

"He has returned," she said. "What can have happened, to bring him back so soon?"

Mrs. Mason caught her frantically by the dress as she was hurrying toward the hall-door.

"My lady?"

"Well?"

"For Heaven's sake,—for your own sake,—say nothing to him of what you have just seen; at least, not till I have time to tell you the story. It would make him so angry, that I do not know what he might do or say. You have never seen him angry; but I have, and it is not a pleasant sight. Will you promise this?"

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly and somewhat impatiently; "but let me go to him now."

The door was thrown open as she spoke; and the earl, dusty and heated with his hurried ride, stood before her.

"Gabrielle," he said hoarsely, "I have bad news for you, which you must bear as bravely as you can. It is you who must go back to Woodstock,—not I."

"My lord, what do you mean?" she inquired.

"Your father is very ill," was the reply, "and you must return to him at once. I met my messenger upon the road, bringing the tidings. I cannot accompany you, as you know; but you may tell him all.—Give her a cloak and bonnet, Mrs. Mason.—There, do not cry so bitterly, my love. I dare say he will be better when you reach home. My man will see you safely there, and wait till you have time to send a message back to me. I shall go on to London at once, and write back to the palace from there, so that they will guess nothing of our secret. Courage, love! don't tremble so. The carriage waits. I will take you down, and shall hope to hear by tomorrow that he is a great deal better, and that all is well with you."

Like one in a dream, Gabrielle let him lead her to the carriage. She scarcely felt his warm and heartfelt kiss as he bade her adieu. She was conscious of only one thing,—that her father was dying, and dying, perhaps, of her rash act; and Cain himself could scarcely have been in greater torment, after the murder of Abel, than was she, sitting in the carriage, and being

whirled swiftly on her way toward her deserted home.

CHAPTER VI.

The cottage looked deserted and silent, but the window of her father's room was open, and Gabrielle could see the figure of her grandmother sitting by the bed, as she came up the garden path.

She opened the outer door softly, and stole up the stairs. The father groaned as she laid her hand upon the latch, and as her grandmother rose to give him a comforting draught, she summoned up her failing courage, and entered the room.

Everything there was neat and tidy, as usual,—but the strong and stalwart man she had left not many hours before. His face was very pale and contracted by a look of intense pain,—a blood-stained bandage was wrapped around his head, another round his right arm. The sight startled and frightened her so, that she forgot all prudence, and crying out,—

"O father! what ails you,—how did you get hurt?" she sprang across the room, and sank upon her knees by the side of the bed.

The sick man started up from his pillows, and the old dame looked sternly at the weeping girl.

"Gabrielle, where have you been?" said the keeper, in a voice of agony.

"O father,—do not blame me,—do not reproach me now."

"Tell me where you have been."

"I am married."

"Married!"

He gave a sigh of intense relief.

"To whom, Gabrielle?"

"To the Earl of Carnigie," said the girl, lifting her head, and looking at him proudly. "See, there is my ring. My husband would have seen you today and told you all, but he heard of your illness, and sent me on instead."

"Married to the earl!" said her father, with a groan. "You foolish child! That I should live to see you deceived by a villain like him! Oh! if I was only strong and well once more, if only to avenge this disgrace! But I am dying, my child—my child"—

He burst into tears, and Gabrielle, half distracted, caught his hand, and pressed it to her lips.

"Father,—dear father,—do not talk

like this! He has not deceived me! I was married to him last night in a chapel by a clergyman of the Church of England. His servant is waiting now to take a message from me to him. Shall I send for him to come here and convince you of the truth of my story? He would obey at once."

"Is this really so?" said the sick man, raising himself on his pillows, and looking at her with earnest eyes. "Gabrielle, my little girl, have you really the right to tell the proud Earl of Carnigie what he is to do, and be obeyed?"

"I have indeed, father. At least, so far as a wife may command her husband. He is the kindest and best of men, and would come instantly, I know, to relieve your anxiety. Why, only this very morning he was talking of you, and planning the home he should give you,—a little farm in Scotland, father, on his own estate, which was to be my wedding gift, and where you and grandmother were to be as happy as the day was long."

"And will he say this to the world, child, as well as to us?"

"Soon, father,—very soon."

"You are sure?"

"I have his promise. And his own cousin, a Mr. Campbell, married us, so that you can prove it at any time."

"God be praised!" said her father reverently; but the old grandmother said nothing. "My little Gabrielle a countess! It seems strange,—but you'll not forget your poor old father, for all that, my dear, and I shall die the happier that I leave you so well cared for. I did think at one time that young Western"—

"Oh, don't talk of him, father," said Gabrielle, with a blush. "He is a very nice, kind man, but I could never have married him,—never."

"It is time for your father to stop talking, and take this draught," said the grandmother, in a cold, hard voice, and Gabrielle drew aside at once. The medicine administered, she stole softly down-stairs, that he might sleep.

How strange and small the little kitchen looked, after a few hours' drilling in the beautiful home that would henceforth be hers! How hard it seemed to realize, as she stood on tiptoe to look in the glass, that she was the same Gabrielle who had left that house so short a time ago!

Her grandmother came down as she was

still arranging her hair before the glass. The face was very grave and stern,—it grew graver and sterner still, as she saw how the girl was employed.

"Go to your room, and dress yourself in something more suitable to your home than that flue robe," she said, pointing to the blue silk dress which Gabrielle wore, and which her father had not remarked. "I should be cut to the heart if any of the neighbors came in, and saw you tricked out like that."

Gabrielle's color rose high, but she did not answer. She walked out to the gate, where the servant still waited, and having despatched a message to the earl, she returned, went up to her own chamber, and presently came into the kitchen clad in her usual garb.

"Thank Heaven for so much!" said the old woman softly; not so softly, however, but that Gabrielle heard her, and turned at once to ask the meaning of the speech.

"You have scarcely spoken to me since I came home, grandmother," she said. "Do you not believe my story? I was wrong in going away as I did, I know, but since all has turned out so well, and my father forgives me, why cannot you?"

"Turned out so well! 'T is the first time I ever knew aught of the Earl of Carnigie's doing that did turn out well."

"Grandmother,—he is my husband!"

"You poor, foolish child."

"Do you not believe me?"

"Believe you? Yes. But I have no faith in the earl. He has deceived you, Gabrielle, and one of these days you will rue the hour when you first met him."

"Grandmother, I will not listen, if you speak like this," said the girl passionately. "I know he has not been a good man to others, but he is very good to me; and I am his wife,—and I love him!"

She spoke hoarsely enough, yet even as the words fell from her lips, she remembered the mysterious picture, and the vision that had appeared behind it, and her heart sank with a nameless dread of something,—she scarcely knew what. Her grandmother only sighed, and was silent.

"Tell me of my father," said the girl, after a little pause. "How did this happen?"

"He came upon some people in the preserves last night,—poachers, I suppose, for they were armed. He ordered them to go

away; they refused, and in the struggle he was shot in the head and in the arm."

"Are the wounds dangerous?"

"Mortal!"

The mother's lips quivered, as she spoke the word, but she shed no tear. Gabrielle turned very pale.

"Do you mean that he will die?"

"Yes."

"O my father!"

"Hush! He will not be with us long, and while he sleeps, he is free from pain. Do not rouse him. I cannot bear to see him suffer as he has suffered till now."

Gabrielle wept silently.

"I am glad he believes your marriage to be a true one, — he will die the easier for it. But, O me, — what shall I do when he is gone? I have lost you both together, — my son! my son!"

She hid her face in her apron, and rocked to and fro, in a passion of silent grief. As Gabrielle gazed at her, mute and awestruck at sight of a sorrow so much deeper than her own, the latch of the door was lifted, and some one entered softly.

It was young Western, and by the way in which he greeted her, Gabrielle perceived that the story of her flight and return was unknown outside those walls. The earl's servants would for their own sakes be silent, and her secret was safe. It was a consolation in that hour of trouble to know that it was so! She held out her hand to the young man, with a faint smile.

"I am glad to see you, — but you come to a sad house."

"I rode over the moment I heard of it," he said, with a trembling voice. "I came to say, that if there is anything that a brother could do for you, for him or for her, at this time, Gabrielle, you must call upon me to do it. I am willing and ready for anything, if I can only be of some little service to you, or to him. Where is he?"

"Up-stairs, and asleep, just now," said Gabrielle, feeling intensely thankful that she had laid aside the blue silk robe.

She slipped her wedding-ring quietly off, while he was consoling her grandmother, and hid it in her bosom. From him, even more than from any other, must the story of her private marriage be hidden for a long time to come.

A noise in the chamber above, a feeble knocking on the floor, attracted her attention.

"My father is calling," she said, in a whisper, and glided up the stairs.

The wounded man was sitting up, but with that ghastly gray hue upon his face, that even to her inexperienced eye betokened the swift approach of death.

"Has he come?" he asked hoarsely.

"Who?"

"The earl."

"Dear father, my message has not reached him yet. He cannot get here for several hours."

"Too late, — it will be too late! But tell him, Gabrielle, from me — your dying father — that if he dares to wrong you" —

Something rattled in his throat, and his eyes began to glaze.

"Dear father, he will not! Grandmother!"

The two whom she had left in the kitchen came running up the stairs.

"For my sake, say nothing of this before Western," she whispered in her father's ear. He moved his head assentingly, yet his eyes were fixed most anxiously upon the young man, as he came up and took his hand.

"A bad job, my lad — a bad job — but we saved the game," he murmured. "My boy, — will you promise me one thing before I die?"

"Anything, sir."

"Take care of them. He pointed to his mother and his daughter. "I leave them in your charge. Don't let harm come nigh to them, if you ever cared for me."

"I will not."

"God bless you, my boy, — and you, mother, — as for Gabrielle, may God guard her," he added, with a strange and sudden change in his tone, understood only by two of the three who heard him.

"The pain is all gone, — better so, — but I know what that means, as well as the doctor," he said drowsily.

He lay for a time perfectly still, and apparently unconscious, while they watched him breathlessly, knowing only too well that every moment now might be his last. Suddenly he looked out toward the window with a clear, bright gaze.

"Tell the duke I did my duty as well as I could. It is nearly sunset. Call my wife."

They were the last words he ever spoke. There was a sudden, swift change in his face, almost like the shadow of a flying wing — at least, so it seemed to Gabrielle —

then all was still! She touched his cheek, — his hand. They were growing cold, and yet his eyes were fixed upon the window, bright and blue as ever, and his mouth was closed, yet half smiling. Could this be death?

Her grandmother tottered forward, and closed the bright, far-seeing eyes, then burst into a flood of tears and sank upon her knees beside the bed.

The young man stepped reverently back, and led Gabrielle from the room. She was half fainting, and clung to him when they reached the kitchen, and hid her face upon the manly breast, that was only too ready to support her.

"Is he dead, — can he be dead?" she sobbed.

"Yes, Gabrielle."

"But his eyes were so clear and bright. — the jaw did not fall, — I never knew that any one could die like that."

"He passed away like one smiling in his sleep. You will only have the sweetest memory of his last look, Gabrielle, — you ought to be grateful for that."

"I am," said the girl, slowly, and she sat down in her grandmother's easy-chair.

How strange it seemed! Only one short day, and the whole current of their household life was changed forever. She, the bride of a nobleman; her grandmother weeping her heart out beside a placid corpse; her father safe in heaven, where nothing could molest or pain him more, — knowing more of the greatest mysteries of existence now than all the living sages of earth, — she could scarcely feel the magnitude of her loss, in the strange and solemn thoughts which it had called forth! Ah, the gayest and most thoughtless of us all must needs pause and reflect, when we look for the first time upon the great act of dying, and remember that he who passes through it beneath our eyes is only rehearsing, as it were, and for our benefit, a scene in which we, too, one day, must bear the principal part.

"Gabrielle," said her companion, after a long silence.

"Yes, — what is it?"

"Some one ought to go at once to the

doctor — and — and to — shall I act for you both, as I might if I was his son and your brother?"

"Oh, if you only would."

"Then remain here till I can send in one of the neighbors. You must not be left alone again till all is over. Then we will talk of the future. Ah, Gabrielle, even at this sad hour I must say it. If it could only be what I once hoped and believed it *would* be" —

He bent down over her as if to take her hand, but she drew it away, and stood before him, calm and pale as a statue.

"It can never be, never! Do not hope or dream of it for one moment. There are more obstacles than you can dream of — that is — Oh, let me be your sister, if you will, — but I can never be your wife!"

"I will never ask you again," he said, looking at her so earnestly and searchingly, that she shrunk before his gaze. "You shall love whom you will, — wed whom you will; and I will only be your faithful friend. Come, look up and smile at me; you know he left you in my care, and I want you to forget what I said just now."

"I will."

She gave him her hand, and he raised it to his lips as gallantly as the earl himself might have done.

"Now put your head upon this pillow," he said, arranging the chair for her, "you look wearied to death, and perhaps you may get a few moments' sleep. Are you comfortable?"

"Very."

"Then good-by. I will only be gone a very little while."

And the brave fellow strode away up the path, forgetting his own sorrow, and only intent on doing some good service to her he loved.

Gabrielle looked after Western with a smile that was very sad, and then leaning her head upon her hand, sank into a painful revery, which, in its turn, changed into an uneasy and broken sleep. Thus the neighbor who had come to take charge of the stricken house found her, and sat down to wait patiently till she should awake.

THE CURSE OF CARNIGIE. *

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

[NO. 4.—COMPLETE IN FOUR NUMBERS.]

CHAPTER VII.

A month passed by, and the keeper's cottage was deserted, and the garden path all overgrown with weeds. The keeper slept quietly enough beneath the osiered turf of Woodstock churchyard,—but where was his aged mother and his pretty little Gabrielle?

Young Western did not know, though he would have given half his humble fortune if he could have brought back the bright-faced girl to that pretty home once more. There had been something in her manner when she thanked him for all his kindness and bade him good-by after her father's funeral, something in her grandmother's manner, too, and in the sorrowful look she gave him as they parted, that had checked the words he longed to utter, and left him only able to stammer forth a wish for her welfare and happiness, that seemed almost absurd when he came to remember it afterward, because it was so weak.

But Gabrielle knew its value, feebly as it had been spoken, and although she dared give him no clew to her new residence, she thought of him often and prayed for him always, within her cottage home. It was a pretty place, that Scottish home of hers! Not the farm which her father was to have called his own, but a lovely cottage, standing on a moor, that was purple with heather and golden with gorse, through the greater part of the year. The smoke that rose from its chimney could be seen for many a mile around, upon the clear, still autumn air,—and the castle gates were not very far away,—the castle gates, whence every morning a jovial party of noblemen and gentlemen emerged to seek for game upon the moors and hills. No one intruded upon Gabrielle's solitude, however. The keepers had the strictest orders, which they obeyed to the letter, and some obstacle was sure to

rise between the gallant sportsmen and the lovely cottage, where all the party suspected, yet not one had the means of proving, that some fair friend of their gallant host had sought and found a shelter.

Fair they guessed her,—frail they thought they knew her to be. But no one among them ventured to question their host on so delicate a point, and Gabrielle enjoyed her solitude, little dreaming how lightly she was looked upon by her lover's boon companions. He knew it well,—yet never uttered a word to clear her fame. And so the month of their sport and pastime melted away.

They were going at last, and Gabrielle's heart rejoiced within her. Short and unfrequent as her interviews had been with the earl, they had been very sweet to her. All trace of arrogance had vanished from his manner; he was always kind, always gentle, always devoted as when she first met him at the farm gate and at Fair Rosamond's Well. There was a happy secret, too, between them now, which made him doubly dear. Ere many months went by, if all was well, she hoped to lay in his arms a baby son, an heir to the glories of his old and stately line. Poor foolish Gabrielle! Even his cold heart sometimes recoiled with horror from the thought of the agony of her waking!

One beautiful moonlight night she sat at her open window, watching for his coming. Her grandmother and their one servant had gone to bed,—she was all alone, and singing some simple love song, she leaned upon the casement and fixed her eyes upon the placid sky. She was happy,—happy to the very heart's core. Every wish was gratified,—every thought at rest. The future lay before her, a long bright vista of love, of sunshine, and of peace, down which she saw herself walking ever by his side, while the fairy forms of their children frolicked

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near. It was a sweet vision,—she never had many more like it, — God help her!

"Gabrielle, are you there?" said a low voice, and she rose with a cry of joy to let her lover in.

"No, do not unbar the door, I cannot come in tonight," he said, as he came and leaned against the low window-sill, where she was sitting.

"Not coming in!"

"No,—I only stole away from them for a moment, to tell you a piece of news which will make you a little sad, though it is all for your good in the end."

"What is it?"

"I am going to London."

"When?"

"With them, — tomorrow."

She clasped her hands with a look of passionate grief.

"O heavens!"

"It is necessary, my love!"

"And I had hoped to have you all to myself for a time, — to be so happy with you when they were all away."

"I know, my dearest; but, as I said before, it is necessary, and I must go."

"But what makes it necessary?"

"Your pretty face, my love."

"What can you mean?"

"Were you not up the glen yesterday, just before sunset?"

"Yes."

"Lord Arthur Hayes, who, by the way, is one of the greatest coxcombs and idiots that ever existed, saw you, and has done nothing but rave about you ever since."

She looked at him timidly.

"Are you angry, Francis? I was really pining for some fresh air, and I thought you were all safe in the castle at dinner."

"No, I am not angry, but do you not see, — the fact is, my love, he made a great many remarks about you that were most unpleasant and annoying for me to hear. I could not resent them, of course, but they galled me almost beyond endurance."

Gabrielle looked as she felt, inexpressibly hurt.

"It is in your power to put an end to such annoyances, my lord, — as it was in your power long ago to have prevented them," she said haughtily.

"Your ladyship is quite right, — and I have come to the determination to be annoyed so no longer."

She still looked at him with the angry

spot burning on her cheek, for she believed that he was mocking her.

"What will you do, my lord?"

"I shall go up to London tomorrow, arrange my affairs and return here only when I can bring my countess home with me," was his quiet reply; and she started as if he had struck her, while the crimson blood rose in a torrent to her brow, and then receded, leaving her deadly pale.

"Francis, are you in earnest?"

"I certainly am."

"O my father! if you had only lived to see this day!" she mused, in a tone of the deepest gratitude. "But he knows it, — even in heaven he knows it, — does he not, dear Francis?"

"Who shall say what those who are in heaven know or feel?" was his evasive reply.

"He must, — he does rejoice in my joy. And my child, Francis, my child and yours! Oh, now, I need not blush to own him when he is born. He will take his proper place in your home as he has already taken it in your heart; and we shall be happy, — almost too happy for this dull earth!"

She leaned from the window as she spoke and threw her arms around his neck. He removed them gently.

"Gabrielle, some one may be watching us even now. You consent then to my going to London?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you will be good and happy during my absence?"

"How can I be otherwise, when I remember why you have gone?"

"Kiss me then, for I must go; or they will miss me, and I don't wish those half-tipsy young men to seek me here. Good-by, love. You shall hear from me in a day or two after I reach London."

He kissed her twice, and walked hurriedly away.

Long did she linger at the casement, thinking of and praying for him, while he was strolling on toward his stately home, sick at heart, and wretched as if a hundred fiends were lashing him with strings and whips of fire!

Long after sunset, on the following day, just when Gabrielle sat at her window, thinking sweet thoughts of her absent lover, his carriage was rushing, as fast as four smoking horses could draw it, up the long

drive at Blenheim Park. Not to London, but to Woodstock, had the false earl gone!

And his errand? Was it really that which he had described to Gabrielle, the settlement of his affairs and the acknowledgment of a fair young bride?

Yes, in that one thing at least, the earl had not lied!

There were few guests at the palace, and they were all his intimate friends. The duke and duchess met him at the foot of the grand staircase, and both welcomed him, and wished him success and happiness in a tone that seemed to mean much. They had dined early at the palace that day, for a famous band was in attendance, and there was to be dancing by moonlight on the greensward, for the guests and for the servants. The duke sat by the earl as he made a somewhat hurried meal, and told him this. Told him much more, too, which made his eyes sparkle and his cheeks flush, far more than did the rosy wine he had been quaffing so freely.

No man could have well looked more graceful and handsomer than did the gallant earl when he joined the dancers at a later hour that evening. Every one seemed glad to meet him, — every one seemed eager to win a glance from his eye; yet all with common consent made way for him when he turned toward a group of ladies who surrounded the duchess. Each bent gracefully to his greeting. Each smiled and blushed as his words of courtesy fell lightly on the ear, for the Earl of Carnigie was a prize indeed in the matrimonial market, and Rumor, with her thousand tongues, whispered now of most serious intentions on his part. Toward whom? One lady might have answered that question, had she felt so inclined. A lady who stood somewhat apart from the others, — tall, dark and beautiful, wearing a robe of rosy gauze, and a cluster of snow-white flowers in her hair. By her side the earl paused at last, — leaning over the bridge to look into the quiet water even as she was doing. She did not start, — she had seen him coming before his face and form were mirrored there beside her own.

"Has Lady Gwendoline alone no welcome for me?" he asked, in a low voice.

She turned and held out her hand with a smile.

"Mine?" he asked, as he pressed it warmly.

"Not yet, my lord."

"The time you named for your decision expires tonight. Is it not yet made?"

"It will be very soon."

"In my favor let me hope."

"We shall see. At present offer me your arm, and let us walk down by Rosamond's Well."

The earl bowed low, and obeyed, though he winced in spite of himself. It is not always pleasant to go with number two, to the very place where you have once breathed the tenderest vows in the ear of number one; but there seemed to be no help for it, and he led her slowly toward the distant well, while many looked after them significantly, and shook their heads, and smiled.

The well was reached, but Lady Gwendoline only paused a moment there. On she went, leaning on his arm and talking all the while, till a sudden opening in the glade left them directly in front of the keeper's cottage. Then she dropped his arm, and was silent.

With something of a pang gnawing at that selfish heart of his, the earl gazed at the melancholy looking place. It had stood empty only a little while, — yet it looked as if it had been deserted for years. Yet he dared not show the slightest sign of feeling while those keen dark eyes were fixed upon his face.

"My lord," said Lady Gwendoline, after a moment's pause, — "I do not wish to inquire into your past life."

"Faith, I would n't advise you to, if you wish to preserve your senses," thought the earl, looking grave with the greatest difficulty.

"But about one thing I must be told."

"What is that?"

"You remember Gabrielle, — the pretty girl who lived here?"

"Certainly."

"My lord, — where is she now?"

"How on earth should I know, Lady Gwendoline?"

He looked so utterly and genuinely astonished at her asking him the question, that her heart beat high with the hope that perhaps after all her suspicions might have wronged him.

"I always feared that you might have been concerned in her disappearance," she said, in a low voice. "And though I shall have many things in your past to forgive if I become your wife, I never could forgive your leading her away."

She was pleading with him to speak the truth; yet every word she uttered drove him farther away from it, unconsciously to herself.

"I know nothing whatever of the young woman," he said gloomily; "and you have wounded me more by your unjust suspicions, Lady Gwendoline, than I can find words to say. Whatever my life may have been, I scarcely think you have any real reason to hold so bad an opinion of me as you seem to do. You can have little regard for me, if, not content with listening to every idle tale you hear, you are actually at the pains to imagine them for yourself. Shall we return to the dancers, Lady Gwendoline?"

His cold and distant manner did more for him than days of abject pleading would have done. She looked at the deserted house, then at him, and could read nothing more than pride and wounded feeling in the face that was so obstinately turned from her.

"Forgive me, my lord," she said, in a low, soft voice. "Forget what I have said; and, if you still wish it, there is my answer to the question you asked me more than three months ago."

She held out her hand, white and soft and sparkling with gems.

"You give it to me without doubt or fear or reservation?" he asked, looking deep into her eyes.

"I do."

"God bless you then, my own love!"

And, before the very gates of poor Gabrielle's former home, he kissed that hand, — the hand of his plighted and noble bride!

CHAPTER VIII.

Little dreaming of the treachery of her lover, Gabrielle remained in her Scottish home, patiently waiting for some tidings of him. She was very busy with her needle, just now, preparing for the reception of the little being whom she already loved so tenderly. The finest materials, the daintiest embroideries that could be devised, were ever in her willing hands; and she said to herself, with a proud smile, as she completed each article, that even her infant earl need not be ashamed to wear the products of his mother's taste and skill.

Well for her that her time was so pleasantly employed, for the earl did not write to

her, and the old grandmother, who had only tolerated his visits when fully convinced of the legality of the marriage, began to look suspicious and indignant.

Gabrielle longed to hear of him, because of this, as well as for her own sake; and, putting on her bonnet one fine evening, she sauntered up the glen toward the castle gates, to soothe her heart, if only by looking at the wall of the mansion so soon to be her home. All seemed bustle and preparation there. The gates were open, trees were being planted, and beds of flowers arranged upon the lawn; and, late in the day though it was, there was a small army of workmen busy upon the roof and walls. Wondering — yet guessing with a thrill of delight — what all this could mean, she called to a little child playing before the lodge, and asked her what these preparations were for. The bairn shaded her eyes with her hand, and answered, with a broad smile, —

"Eh, sirs! Just to think of your not knowing. T' earl is going to be married."

Gabrielle blushed deeply.

"Mammy's up there washing; and I have to take care of the lodge the while," was the reply.

"And who is the earl going to marry?"

"A braw lady."

"Do you know her name?"

"Nay; but she's a braw lady, — and she has the siller, too!"

"Not much of that, I think," said Gabrielle, with a smile, as she turned away.

Her heart was full of joy as she hurried down the sunset glen; but when she reached her home, and related what she had heard, her grandmother looked grave and startled.

"I don't like what the child said, my dear," she observed, after a long silence.

"Why not, grandmother?"

"About the silver."

Gabrielle laughed.

"That was her mistake: I certainly have no silver."

"Some one else may have."

"Grandmother!"

"Gabrielle, you have had your own way thus far in this thing: now I mean to have mine. This man may have deceived you sure, after all."

"Never!"

"Well, at all events, we will soon find out. It seems odd to me that he should be making all this piece of work at the castle,

and yet never write to you. Depend upon it, Gabrielle, something is wrong."

"I cannot think how you can permit yourself to say such things."

"And I cannot think how you can permit yourself to believe every word that man says to you," replied her grandmother, in great wrath. "I never liked him: I never shall, even if he is forty times your husband. And I shall always feel, when I think of him, as if he was trying to deceive you. This certainly looks like it. His bride needs preparing as much as his castle; for I suppose he does not intend you to wear stuff gowns when you are a countess. And yet he neither comes nor writes nor sends, — though he has plenty of lazy loons to run his errands when any mischief is to be done. No, no: we'll none of that! We must know what my lord is up to; or we shall look fine and silly, one of these days, when he brings a wife home over your very head."

"I at least do not distrust him," said Gabrielle proudly.

"It might be better if you did. But, at all events, I am determined to be obeyed in this one thing. You would not let young Western have aught to say to you, though your poor father left you in his care" —

"I am the earl's wife. What has Martin Western to do with me?"

"Well, I am your grandmother; and, though your husband were ten times grander, nobler, and richer than he is, you owe me respect and obedience all the same. And I command you, for my sake, for your own, and for the sake of your unborn child, to go with me at once, and find out what this report about the 'braw lady' means."

"It can mean but one thing."

"I am not so sure of that. But, at all events, we'll know ere long. Get your things ready. We will go and ask the earl ourselves."

There was no combating the resolute old woman, now that her suspicions were fully aroused. The utmost concession which Gabrielle could obtain from her was a promise that she would wait at the Oxfordshire cottage till the earl should be written to, and his reply received. If that reply was not a speedy one, she declared she would go to him instantly, and make him give it, even if she had to follow him to London, to Woodstock, — nay, to the foot of the very throne itself, if that was necessary.

So it was not with the lightest of hearts that Gabrielle set out on her journey. It was long and tedious; and for the first time since her marriage she felt ill and despondent. The grief and anxiety which she had suffered at the time of her father's death had told more than she was aware of upon a frame and organization unusually delicate; and now that the doubts and surmises of her grandmother had rendered her uneasy, she felt a languor and lassitude creeping over her which was as strange as disagreeable, but which no exertion of her own could drive away.

They reached B — late on the following evening, and, hiring a post-chaise, drove out at once to the cottage. Gabrielle's heart beat high as the post-boy dismounted, and pulled the bell. What if the earl, by any strange chance, should have stopped there on his way to or return from London? What joy, what rapture it would be to meet him! But, ah! would he ever forgive her for leaving Scotland? and, above all, for doubting him sufficiently to follow on his track, and demand a proof of what had already been proved, so far as it was in his power to certify to it?

"I don't think there is anybody in the house at all," said the post-boy, staring stupidly at her.

"Pull again."

He obeyed, and after the lapse of a few moments the gate slowly unclosed, and a gruff, old-woman's voice asked surlily, —

"Who be you? and what do you want?"

"Visitors," said the boy.

"Visitors! Humph! It's precious few of them as comes here."

"Well, they've come tonight. So just open that gate, and" —

"I does n't open this gate for no one, my lad."

Gabrielle alighted, and advanced toward her.

"I used to live here once," she said, in a faltering voice.

"You?"

The old woman looked searchingly in her face, and then smiled evilly.

"Like enough, like enough, my pretty miss. What of that?"

"Where is the earl?" asked Gabrielle, growing confused and frightened at her strange manner.

"The earl? Oh, lauk-a-daisy! we don't know nothing about any earls here now."

The gentleman as used to own this place has given it up. He's going to be married, and turn over a new leaf, they say; and so you see, my pretty miss, he has no more use for the house. It is to be pulled down, I believe; and that is the best they can do with it, in my opinion."

"Grandmother, what shall we do?" said Gabrielle, turning pale.

"Do? why, go in, to be sure. Here, my good woman, let me speak to you a moment."

She drew the Cerberus aside. Gabrielle, leaning against the pillar of the gate for the support which she so sorely needed, saw that the woman's face changed as she listened, and, when her grandmother had finished speaking, she bustled off toward the house in a great hurry.

"Tell the boy to feed his horses, and wait; and do you come in," said Mrs. Monturue.

And Gabrielle obeyed.

She found herself once more in the avenue of cedars; but, oh, where was he who had trod it with her not many weeks before? She began to fear that, after all, her grandmother had been in the right. Why should Lord Carnage have given up this place, endeared to them both by the most sacred remembrances, without consulting her? She dreaded to answer the rapid questions which her heart began to ask, and walked on, in moody silence, toward the house.

They entered, not at the chapel door, but at the great hall where Gabrielle had parted with her lover on hearing of her father's illness. She seemed to see him there before her, gay, gallant, and handsome, as she crossed the marble floor. The door of the breakfast-saloon was open: not one article of furniture in the dear old room had been changed or moved. She sank down upon the sofa, and took off her bonnet with a trembling hand. The grandmother walked up and down the saloon with a hurried, agitated step. The old woman who had admitted them looked at Gabrielle for a few moments with a pitying face, then poured out a goblet of wine, and brought it to her. She took it, and drank eagerly: she seemed to feel, dimly, that the crisis of her life was approaching, and was glad to borrow strength with which to meet it, since, at that fatal moment, she really had none of her own.

"Now let me know all," she said, turn-

ing to the woman. "Have you ever seen the earl?"

"Scores of times."

"You know then for a certainty that he has given up this place?"

"Oh, yes! the agent told me so, himself, when he came to get me to look after it."

"How long ago?"

"A week yesterday."

"But the servants: where are they?"

"You mean the man and woman who used to live here?"

"Yes."

"They're gone; and it's a mercy."

"Why so?"

"The wickedness that Mrs. Mason was up to passes belief. She helped the earl in everything; and I know if I had ever seen either of them a-speaking to my gal, — my Betsy Jane, — I'd have torn their eyes out!"

"Where is Mrs. Mason now?" asked Gabrielle faintly.

"In a mad-house."

"A mad-house! How came she there?"

"Well, you see she had some good points abo' her, after all; and, if she had, why, I'm sure the old gentleman below must have too, — for she's all one with him in every way. However, she took a fancy to one young woman the earl brought here, ever so long ago; and when he turned her off, and the poor thing went crazy, Mrs. Mason took pity on her, and smuggled her back into the house, and my lord never knew a word about it, leastways till he came here, all of a sudden, a little while ago, — and they do say he had a young lady with him then, — and the poor, mad thing strayed about, and scared them all nearly out of their wits. A pretty scene there was, as you may well imagine; and the earl discharged Mrs. Mason, as soon as he got at the rights of it, and has never been near the place from that day to this."

Gabrielle sat silent, with drooping head. Too well she knew that she had been listening to her own story in the last words; and she dared not look her grandmother in the face.

"Mrs. Mason took the girl away with her, that she had been so kind to," the old woman resumed. "Where the other one went to, I never knew; but she disappeared suddenly, and the earl made short work with the place after she had gone. As for the poor mad creature, nothing could be done

with her; and Mrs. Mason had grown so fond of her, from having her always round, that when they had to take her to the mad-house, she went too, to wait on her, and to be sure that she was well used."

"And the clergyman, — Lord Carnagie's cousin, — what became of him?" said Gabrielle, in a low voice.

"The which? Oh, that rogue! He ought to be whipped at the cart's tail, — that he ought, — and I only wish I had the job of doing it. The wretch used to dress himself up as a parson, and marry my lord to these girls; and the poor things thought it was all right, and never stopped to consider that they had no witnesses, and no certificate to show, nothing on earth but a plain-gold ring, to prove it; while the greatest villain on earth stood ready to swear he never gave it to them! The greatest villain? No: I don't think he was, after all. He was a wicked man, — that earl, — as bad as a man could be, and live! But his brother was worse yet; for he sold those poor girls just as much as if he had brought them from a slave-market, — and he did it for nothing but money! He is away with the rest of them; and I only hope we shall never see any of their faces here again!"

Gabrielle was looking at her with intense surprise.

"His brother? The earl's brother? I thought it was his cousin."

"No, his brother; but not one that he is willing to own exactly. His father before him was a gay man; and the earl and Mr. Campbell are so much alike that they might almost be mistaken for each other. So they go on, you see, from father to son, — all bad together. It is all very well for them while they are on this earth, I suppose," added the old woman, with a tragic flourish of her hand; "but I would not have their sins to answer for up yonder, — no, not for a hundred thousand pounds!"

Gabrielle paused to hear no more, but took a light, and stole softly from the room; while her grandmother inquired more closely into times, places, and circumstances, of which she could not now bear to hear.

She passed through the hall, and lingered before the library door. A breeze came sweeping through the vaulted passage, and it moved upon its hinges. It was not locked: she pushed it open, and entered.

The books had been taken down, and stood ready — packed in great wooden box-

es — for removal. She looked round with a shudder, then went toward the picture-gallery. It was empty and silent. The piano was gone: so were all the pictures; and where the portrait of the Italian lady had hung a new panel was loosely adjusted to the wall. She pushed it aside with the greatest ease, and looked in upon a large but rather dusky room, with hangings and furniture of crimson velvet, and rug formed of the skin of a tiger, whose glass eyes glared fearfully at her in the dim light. A lute was flung carelessly upon a velvet couch, its strings broken, and its ribbon soiled and torn. The hand that once woke its haunting music would never touch it more; the voice it used to echo was heard only in the meaningless gibberings of a maniac's cell! Through this scene of ruin and desolation, Gabrielle wandered with a restless and vacant air, too wretched to weep, too deeply stunned thoroughly to realize the sorrow that had fallen upon herself. At last, almost without knowing it, she ascended the staircase, and found herself in the rooms which she and the earl had occupied during their brief stay at the place.

She looked around at the costly decorations of the toilet-table, at the brilliant hangings of the room, and it seemed as if her heart must break at once. She threw herself on the bed, hid her face in the pillow which his cheek had once pressed, and burst into a bitter passion of tears.

There her grandmother found her, after a time, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. She had no hesitation in rousing her, however, and Gabrielle sprang up, with a frightened look, and put both hands to the head that seemed as if it would burst with its maddened throbbings.

"It is time to go," said the old woman harshly. "I have found out all I wanted to know, and you can weep for him as well at home as here."

"At home?"

"Yes."

"In Scotland?"

"Is that your home?"

"Where are you going, then?"

"Back to Woodstock."

"O grandmother!"

"Be easy," was the harsh reply. "Your beloved earl is there; and it will go hard with me if I do not make him rue this piece of villainy. He has lived with you in Scotland as his wife, — there is no getting over

that,—and I believe he must acknowledge you as Countess of Carnegie yet, in spite of himself. Come: the boy is waiting still; and, late as it is, you shall not sleep under this roof tonight.”

She hurried the bewildered girl downstairs. The old attendant met them in the hall, and forced upon Gabrielle a paper of sandwiches, and another glass of wine. The rough and rude demeanor was now entirely changed. She spoke to the girl, and looked at her, with as much respect as if her marriage with the earl was already acknowledged. So much good her long conversation with Mrs. Monturne had done; and Gabrielle was cheered and comforted by the alteration, though it was but a flimsy foundation upon which to build her hopes once more!

They sprang and blossomed rapidly, however, during that long night-ride. She knew her grandmother's energy, perseverance, and determination so well that she looked for great results from their active exercise; and as the fever of her mind cooled, and the saddening influences of the deserted cottage were left far behind, she grew more calm and happy, and, closing her eyes, slept a light and tranquil slumber until she was roused from her pleasant dreams by the stopping of the chaise before her father's garden-gate.

CHAPTER IX.

The happy morning dawned at last, and the village bells rang a merry peal as the bride and bridegroom passed arm-in-arm from the church and down the path of flowers that had been strewed beneath their feet by the children of the village.

Great guns were booming in the park; flags were flying from every side of the palace; the grounds were thrown open to the public: it was one of the few occasions, in fact, in which the people were allowed to rejoice with their haughty duke; and most eagerly did they avail themselves of the universal privilege.

The bridal chariot passed up the long drive between two lines of bowing rustics, and courtesying women and girls. Lady Gwendoline sat a little forward, returning the salutations she received on every side with smiles and blushes that well became her; but the earl leaned back in his own corner, and seemed to look upon the pa-

geant with gloomy eyes. Now that the long suspense was over, and the prize well and fairly won, he felt that re-action which always follows close upon such exertion: he had leisure to think of other things, apart from his bride; and his thoughts were not remarkably pleasant ones, if one might judge from the expression of his face.

Suddenly, through all the pealing bells and booming cannon and murmured greetings, a woman's voice rose, loud, distinct, and shrill; the voice of an old woman, cracked and strained by age and wrath, yet still a voice that was plainly heard by all.

“Lord Carnigie,” it said; and even the post-boys checked their steeds to see who dared to address their master. “Lord Carnigie.”

And the earl sat upright, turning very pale, while the dark eyes of his bride were fixed upon his face.

An aged woman, dressed in deep mourning, and with her long, gray hair streaming from beneath the widow's cap she wore, pressed through the rank of spectators, dragging after her a young girl, who appeared frightened almost to death by her violence and rage. She checked the post-boys, who would have driven on; she planted herself close by the side of the carriage, and, lifting her withered hand, pointed straight at the guilty earl.

A murmur of angry and indignant compassion ran through the crowd, who guessed what was coming, when they recognized Gabrielle and her grandmother. Before that murmur died away, a stalwart young man stepped forward, and stood beside the girl. It was young Western,—thus boldly owning his love, and offering his protection, in the face of all, even though he felt, with a deadly sinking of the heart, that only shame and disgrace were hovering over the fair head that must always be so dear to him.

“Neighbors, you see that man!” said the old woman, breaking the breathless silence. “He would like to drive over me where I stand; but he dares not: he knows he must wait, and hear all I have to say. You know the name he bears: you know the kind of man he is, and always has been; but you know my Gabrielle too. A better or more modest girl never lived on earth. That villain saw her,—was pleased to love her, as he termed it. He knew he could only deceive her in one way. He met her first as if he was a poor man: then he told her his

real name, and at last married her privately in B—— chapel, in Oxfordshire. His own half-brother—his father's illegitimate son—performed the ceremony, disguised as a clergyman of the Church of England, and Gabrielle believed it to be real. He took her to Scotland. I went with her; and for a time—in fact, until very lately—he imposed upon me too. I really thought she was his wife, and the Countess of Carnigie, till I heard of this intended marriage, this real marriage which he has made today. And then I brought my girl here to tell her story to you all, before him. What ought to be done to a man like this?"

"Drive on!" cried the earl, in a voice of thunder, recovering at last from the stupor into which he had been thrown by the unexpected sight of Gabrielle, and the old woman's harangue. "Drive on, you block-heads! clear the way, you gaping idiots, and let us pass!"

He sprang to his feet in the carriage, gesticulating wildly in his furious rage. The frightened rustics shrank back, the post-boys plied whip and spur, and the carriage swept rapidly on to the palace steps.

"Francis! Francis!" wailed a wild, sweet voice; but he did not, or would not, hear or heed. Gabrielle stood for a moment, with outstretched hands, gazing wildly after him, then fell heavily to the ground.

Young Western raised her in his arms. A thin, red stream was oozing from her lips, and her face had lost every vestige of color. She looked up at him with a faint smile, and tried to speak.

"Tell him"—

And the blood poured in a torrent from her mouth. She shivered slightly all over, her head fell upon his breast, and she ceased to breathe.

They took her sadly home, and the bell that had rung out the wedding peal of her betrayer that morning tolled the funeral bell ere night. Young Western sat beside her corpse, a dark and woeful man, while that death-bell was ringing. When it ceased, he went out among his friends and companions; and half an hour later a private messenger was sent to the duke by the landlord of the Crown, advising the immediate and

private departure of the Earl of Carnigie.

The duke, being a sensible man, took the friendly warning as it was meant, and conveyed it to his guest. An hour after, the group of dark-faced conspirators were startled by the intelligence that the earl had gone.

He was far away from Woodstock, even then; and their vengeance was snatched from their hands. Not even their fear of the duke could have restrained them, had he been in their power for one moment; and he knew it too well.

He had gone, but his fair bride remained behind. Rumor said that they had parted forever. The countess attended the funeral of poor Gabrielle, she wept bitterly at her grave, she raised a costly monument above it; and I know, for a fact, that it was more than a year before she even looked again upon the face of the banished lord.

When they did meet, at last, theirs was a most unhappy marriage. The earl's heir died at its birth: the countess had no other child; and from that day to this the estates have never descended in a direct line, and it is said by the peasantry never will, because the "Curse of Carnigie" fell from the lips of Gabrielle's grandmother above her darling's grave!

I cannot say how this may be. I only know that the earl's life was full of grief and disappointed hopes and shame; that his wife detested him; and that little peace or comfort could have dwelt within his heart after his last victim's death.

The aged housekeeper and her insane charge rested together not long after Gabrielle passed away, and the old grandmother's grave is sheltered by the marble monument which Lady Gwendoline gave to mark the resting-place of her unhappy rival.

Over that grave the summer flowers bloom sweetly, and the wild-birds always sing: around it the tall trees wave, and the little children play. "After life's fitful fever, she sleeps well." Let us thank Heaven that, though the days of her earthly pilgrimage were few, and full of evil, she has now passed "over the river," and dwells in a land where all is rest and peace.

THE DANCING LEAVES.

EYTINGE, MARGARET

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THE DANCING LEAVES.

BY MARGARET EYTINGE.

How the leaves that had fallen from the great trees bending over the water all of a sudden commenced to dance on the beach! Red leaves, yellow leaves, brown leaves, leaves of all shades and colors. They twirled and whirled and sprang in the air, and then ran gayly after each other with little prancing steps. It looked as though a rainbow, a little faded, had broken to pieces upon the sands. The wind laughed and shouted, and the more he laughed and shouted, faster and faster danced the leaves.

A little sunfish popped his head out of the water, his scales glistening like silver. "How merry you all are!" he said. "I almost wish I were a leaf."

"It is our last dance," said the leaves, as they waltzed past him, "and when it is over we shall lie down, bid good-by to au-

turn, and wait for winter to come and cover us up with his white snow mantle."

"How can you be so happy about it?" asked the sunfish. "I'm sure I shouldn't like to lie down and be hidden away forever under any kind of a mantle."

"Why should we be sad?" asked the leaves in turn. "We have had a lovely life, months of birds and showers and sunshine, swinging to and fro in the sweet-scented air. And now that we are parted from our parent trees, we do not repine, but, glad with the memories of past summer hours, dance gayly out of our woodland world to the sound of the laughing wind." And they danced and danced until, tired and weary, they dropped all in a heap beside an old gray stone that lay on the beach, and the wind, flinging some sand over them, fled laughing away.

"THE DEVIL'S PUNCH-BOWL."

BY MRS. MARY F. WILLIAMS.

Miss Vanstone was entertaining her sister Leora's dear five hundred friends, and not finding too much enjoyment in the process. Such was not the case with Miss Leora, however, for that young lady was devoting herself enthusiastically to the pleasure of the moment; which, by the way, chanced to be the pleasure of a conspicuous flirtation with the handsome young man who had just led her away from the piano, and now stood conversing with her, quite oblivious to the performance of her successor at the instrument.

They formed a very attractive picture, as they stood beneath the glow of a chandelier, the light from which seemed really to glitter upon Leora's shining hair. She was a blonde; but not of the usual pale, listless type. A brilliant, sparkling creature, with fiery, violet eyes, and glowing cheeks, and bright, waving torrents of hair; with a voice that rung clear as bell-notes on a frosty morning, and a laugh that was thrilling in its sweetness. More than one man among the guests of the evening had learned the power of her attractions, to his cost; and having felt their sting as well, now took revenge by pronouncing her an unconscionable flirt. And certainly her manner toward her present companion had somewhat of that appearance. She was listening with an air of the greatest deference to what he was saying, while she smiled upon him with eyes whose alluring sweetness would seem to promise him every hope if it was a plea of love that he was urging. But it was not, as those other burnt moths could testify from their own experience. Leora Vanstone never allowed her victims to proceed so far as the making of "a declaration;" the young man was only expatiating upon the beauties of a picture he had lately seen.

He was a slender, dark-eyed youth, with black curls, and a Napoleon mustache as black as his hair. Impetuous passion showed in every lineament of his strangely handsome face; and even a casual eye could see the traces of dissipation there. Nor did it require much penetration to perceive that he loved Leora Vanstone with a passionate vehemence that was almost adoration. If

he had dared to tell her so, he would not have qualified the assertion; he would not have said *almost*, but *quite*.

It has been said that they made a very attractive picture, but evidently it was not a pleasing one to the eyes of Colonel Owen Hildreth. The colonel was a grave, earnest man of thirty-five, tall, stately of aspect, but not handsome; and no beauty was added to his countenance by the sneer of scorn which curled the corners of his brown-bearded lip, as he stood looking at Leora and her youthful companion. Such biting contempt was in his expression, that his thoughts were not to be mistaken; and Miss Vanstone, beside whose chair he stood, looked up and read them in his face. Unimpressible as she usually appeared, Estelle Vanstone was devotedly attached to her sister, and as she comprehended the contempt in the colonel's look, an angry flush rose to her cheek, and she gave him a haughty look, that, according to all precedent, ought to have withered him, but it did not.

Miss Vanstone's wrath was a thing which not many of her acquaintance cared to encounter; but Colonel Hildreth was so far undaunted by it as to say, with a tone as contemptuous and sarcastic as the look with which he had been favoring Leora,

"Good enough for a charade from Owen Meredith, is it not, Miss Vanstone?"

"How dare you, Colonel Hildreth?" demanded Miss Vanstone, indignantly. "You shall not look at my sister like that, sir!"

"I should look at her, I suppose, as poor Everard is looking, just now!" retorted the colonel, with unabated sarcasm; adding, with intense bitterness, "Doubtless it would be very satisfactory to her vanity; but I am not willing to add myself to the list of her conquests; it is quite enough for me that she is ruining my friend!"

"I should say that young man was already pretty thoroughly ruined; it is hardly to be feared that my sister will do that which is already accomplished!" said the lady, sharply. She repented the words in a moment, when the colonel gave her a reproachful glance, and said, gravely,

"No, Estelle, I do not think he is entire-

ly ruined; Heaven knows he has been near it, but I hope to save him yet—if Miss Leora will let me!"

In her regret, Estelle excused the bitter words with which he closed, and said, very gravely and with a grace peculiar to herself,

"Forgive me, Owen; I should not have said that, and I certainly do not mean it. But you have no right to speak of my sister in such words as you have been using."

"They were true, at least," returned the colonel. "She is a heartless coquette!"

Miss Vanstone gave him a singular look, as she exclaimed,

"Heartless, is she? Do you think so?"

"Can she have a heart, and be so cruel?" asked her companion, sternly. "She knows that Everard Westmaire loves her with a love little short of worship; she knows what he has been and what he is; she should know if she is capable of reason, that a great disappointment at this crisis in his life would surely be his ruin; and yet—look there!"

Estelle followed his glance, and a grave pained look came into her eyes, as she saw her sister give to Everard Westmaire a rose from the bouquet in her hand; and the young man pressed it to his lips with a fervent delight that could not be affected. Then he bent forward and seemed to return it, with some pleading words that brought the red blushes to Leora's cheek: but she took the flower and fastened it with her own hands upon his coat.

"Look at him!" said Colonel Hildreth, with almost a groan. "Is he a subject for her trifling, do you think?"

"She is wrong; Leora is very wrong and thoughtless," murmured Estelle Vanstone, anxiously. "What can I do, Owen?"

"Can you not remonstrate with your sister?" asked the colonel. "Remind her of the consequences to Everard—intercede for him, Miss Vanstone."

"I will," said Estelle, rising with a resolute face. "I will put a stop to this, if my influence is of any avail. I will separate them at once, and Leora shall understand that such thoughtlessness is really wickedness. She shall see no more of him if I have to send her away!"

Colonel Hildreth looked startled, and as Estelle turned to leave him, he exclaimed,

"I did not mean *that*; good heavens! it would kill him! Estelle—"

But Miss Vanstone was gone, and he could only stand looking after her with aux-

ious eyes, as she swept her heavy silken train across the room, and spoke to one of a group of gentlemen, who bowed with a pleased expression and gave his arm to Miss Vanstone. Going over to the retired corner where Leora and her companion were sitting, Estelle introduced the gentleman, and Colonel Hildreth saw Everard Westmaire rise and bow, while Leora bent her golden head with smiling grace. Immediately after, she was seen going in to supper on the arm of her sister's friend, while Estelle followed at a distance with Everard.

For the remainder of the evening, she kept him away from her sister, without the appearance of any such intention, yet effectually. Leora seemed hardly aware of the circumstance; she flirted at the end of the evening exactly as she flirted at its beginning, with as little change in her manner as if she had been really unconscious that she had several times changed partners in the dangerous game. As for poor Everard Westmaire, he seemed lost in such a sea of wrath, bewilderment and love, that Colonel Hildreth, in compassionate sympathy, made excuse for leaving and carried him off at an early hour.

Owen Hildreth was one of the few people on whom Miss Vanstone bestowed the honor of calling them her friends. Leora counted her intimacies by dozens, and was far from critical about their worth; but Estelle's half dozen friends (if she had so many) were all of them tried and found worthy of her approval, long ago; for Miss Vanstone was no longer young. More than thirty years of experience had well fitted her to be the guide, companion and general mentor of her lovely young half-sister, for Leora was only that, but dearer than many sisters are to the stately and proud Estelle.

Their family was old and aristocratic, and they were rich enough to keep up all its old-time state, and handsome enough to grace their social position; but the rare old manor-house and all its broad, outlying acres, the row of brown-stone city houses, and the handsome credit at the bank, were all Estelle's. Miss Vanstone's few trusted friends, however, were well aware that her will was made, and all she had would be Leora's in the event of her death. The sisters had no living relative, save Owen Hildreth, and he was but a cousin many times removed; and as he never presumed upon his relationship (which was also confined to Estelle), Miss

Vanstone regarded him with very high esteem, and sometimes condescended to consult him in matters where it seemed that masculine advice would be desirable. Perhaps among all her friends she valued him most highly.

The colonel very seldom noticed Leora in any manner, and it was generally accepted that he disapproved of her; and very properly, too, said Miss Leora's dear five hundred intimates, for she certainly was a most scandalous flirt. It was a wonder Miss Vanstone could permit her to go on so outrageously.

Like Miss Vanstone, the colonel had few intimates. Indeed, with the exception of that lady, he had but one—Everard Westmaire. People usually thought it a strange friendship, for Everard was very young, little more than a boy indeed, and different in every respect from Owen Hildreth; yet the grave colonel loved the wild, brilliant youth with more than a brother's love. The young man had indeed "been very near to ruin," when the colonel first met him; an orphan and without friends or experience, he had fallen into evil hands, and wildly gone astray from the path of virtue and sobriety. From one reckless step to another, he had come at last to the brink of total ruin; beset by tempters, driven by pecuniary needs, mad and discouraged, he was about to plunge desperately into crime, when his guardian angel came in the very prosaic form of Colonel Owen Hildreth, into whose hands he fell, and was saved. Owen was not a romantic man, but when he chanced to discover the position in which this boy had involved himself, there came to him the memory of a fair young brother whom he had loved and who was dead; and he fancied that Everard was like him. He thought with a shudder of horror what his feelings would have been to see his own brother in this boy's place; and thenceforth he vowed to spare no effort for Everard Westmaire's sake.

And the vow was kept; he spared neither time nor money, and he had plenty of both. He won the confidence and love of the impulsive young fellow, and little by little he had led him away from his old companions and old habits. He had his reward in seeing Everard's earnest effort to deserve his friendship and be worthy of his trust. The young man's future promised well, for he had brilliant talents, and was truly seeking

to redeem the past. There was more than a hope that he would yet be a noble and a useful man; and all this was Owen Hildreth's work. He had made a man of Everard, and the youth looked up to him and loved him with so much veneration and respect that there was something almost paternal in Owen's affection for him. And Owen's heart was wrung to see him now, when life seemed so bright before him, risking all his hopes upon the whim of a coquette.

He was thinking of these things, as he walked over to Miss Vanstone's house, on the morning after that lady's evening reception; and some very bitter thoughts concerning Leora Vanstone were mingled with his sad ones concerning Everard. Nevertheless, when Estelle met him in her little private parlor, his first words were:

"Miss Leora—where is she, Estelle? You surely have not sent her away?"

"Not yet," replied Estelle, gravely. "She has not gone, but she is going."

"Going? where is she going?"

"To visit one of her friends. She has several invitations for the winter, and I have advised her to accept the last. She will leave in three days; and I promise you, colonel, that I will talk to her seriously, before she goes, about her conduct toward your friend."

Miss Vanstone spoke with much dignity, and some evident regret for Leora's intended absence; she was about to continue her remarks, when something in the colonel's expression arrested her speech.

"What is the matter, Colonel Hildreth?" she inquired, after regarding him for a moment. "Are you not satisfied? Surely I can do no more?"

"Miss Vanstone — Estelle—" faltered Owen, "do not let her go away! do not, I beg!"

Miss Vanstone regarded him with stately surprise, as she said,

"I hardly understand you, I think."

"Do you not see?" he cried, impatiently. "Do you know that Everard's life, perhaps his reason, depends upon his winning Leora Vanstone's love? If you send her away, what will be his gain? For heaven's sake, did you think I meant *that*, when I asked you to intercede with her?"

"What else can you mean?" she asked.

"This: that nothing on earth, save your sister's requital of his love, can keep my

friend from ruin! I want her to marry him!" returned the colonel.

Miss Vanstone stared at him in dead silence, and slowly the same peculiar expression stole over her face with which she had regarded him when he called her sister heartless. At length, she murmured, under her breath,

"Poor Leora! this is hard!"

Then she spoke in a louder tone,

"You ask an utter impossibility. I cannot urge my sister to marry Mr. Westmaire; I cannot mention such a question to her. Were I to do so, it would be quite in vain, I assure you."

"But why not?" urged Owen. "He is not a bad match for her. I shall make him my heir, and should see that his means were such as to give his wife a good position in society, if he married. And with the encouragement of the woman he loves, I have not a doubt that he would make his future a brilliant one. She may ~~not~~ be proud to share it with him."

Miss Vanstone listened quietly until he ended; then she replied, simply,

"No, colonel, it cannot be."

"Do you mean it, Estelle? Is there no hope for him?" entreated the colonel.

"None," she answered, firmly. "Leora will never marry Everard Westmaire."

"Then how dared she teach him to hope for it! Why did she encourage him to believe his love returned?" cried Owen, in a sudden blaze of anger. "Why, if not merely to amuse herself by playing with his loving heart, poor boy! only to break it and toss it away at last!"

His anger and grief made him forget his usual calm and grave deportment; and Estelle replied, also with unaccustomed warmth,

"You have no right to say that, Owen. You do not know of what you speak. I, who know my sister's heart, could tell you another cause for her seeming heartlessness."

"Can any cause excuse away its consequences to Everard?" asked the colonel, bitterly.

"Owen Hildreth! do you think that no one can suffer save Everard?" she demanded, in almost exasperated tones. "You talk to me of *his* love and *his* disappointment, while my sister—"

She stopped suddenly, as if with an effort to keep back the vehement words that she

might regret when spoken. But Owen gnawed fiercely at his brown mustache, and as she did not finish her speech, broke out, in cold sarcasm,

"Well, what of your sister? To all appearances, Miss Leora is hardly an object of compassion!"

His sneering words were too much for Miss Vanstone's restraint; and she impulsively retorted,

"So much for appearances! Shall I tell you *why* my sister will not marry Everard Westmaire? Will you believe it, Colonel Hildreth, if I tell you that she loves another?"

It seemed that Colonel Hildreth found it rather difficult to believe this piece of information. He sat for some moments, evidently trying to reconcile it with his settled opinion of Leora's incapability of so true an emotion as love. At last he seemed to accept it, for he cried out, in sudden anguish—

"Heaven help my poor friend, then! He will die or go mad!"

"He will do neither," said Miss Vanstone. "Else how does my sister live; how has she lived for years, and kept her reason, when the man whom she almost adores is like so much ice to her?"

"You do not mean—" commenced Owen.

"I mean," she said, "that Leora's love is not returned. She gave her heart and hand to Everard Westmaire, when I have seen her this very hour crushed to the ground beneath the coldness and scorn of the man whom she loves with such a love your boyish friend never dreamed of! and *you* to ask it!"

The colonel was silent now from other feelings than those which had restrained his speech before. But Estelle continued:

"Leora has been very thoughtless, I admit, but she has been no worse. She did not think of the harm that might come from her conduct; she thought of nothing but to find oblivion for her own misery, in the whirl of society and continual diversion. Everard Westmaire is brilliant and entertaining as a companion, and when Leora turned to him for relief from another's indifference, she forgot what the result might be; and I am sorry, as she will be when I tell her; but she is not a heartless coquette, Owen."

Owen Hildreth's face was very grave and full of wonder when Estelle ceased speaking. His tones were gentle when he said,

"Estelle, I am sorry that I have called her so. May I know the name of the man who is so indifferent to Miss Leora? Perhaps there is a mistake; it may be that his feelings are not what she thinks them."

"It may be!" murmured Estelle, with a singular emphasis. "I have half a mind to tell you," she added.

"Tell me," he urged; "why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" repeated Estelle. "Since I have told you so much, then, I will tell you all. Leora loves—"

"Whom?"

"Yourself, Colonel Owen Hildreth!"

The effect of this unlooked-for announcement was overwhelming. Owen turned pale and fairly staggered as he started from his seat, exclaiming,

"What! Did you say that Leora—"

"I say that you are the man whom Leora loves," repeated Estelle.

He drew his breath with a long, hard sigh, and all the hidden passion of his nature burst from his lips, in the cry:

"Estelle Vanstone, she is the only woman I ever loved!"

"Owen! is it so?" cried Estelle. "You love my sister?"

"With all my heart!" breathed Owen. "I have loved her half my life, and cursed myself for loving her, whom I tried to despise!"

A light foot-fall was heard outside the door, and Estelle raised her hand with a warning gesture.

"Hush! she is coming."

As she ceased to speak, Leora came into the room, stopping suddenly as she saw the colonel, then bowing to him, and speaking to Estelle,

"I thought you were alone, Estelle; shall I go away?"

"Certainly not, for Colonel Hildreth," smiled her sister. "You look as if you had come to tell me something," she added.

"It was only to say that Mr. Westmaire is in the drawing-room," she replied, "and wished me to go for a walk. I came to see if you would go, too?"

Estelle signified her willingness to accompany them; and turning to Owen, she said,

"Come, Colonel, we will all go. I suppose you do not object?"

The colonel did not object, but he hardly found a voice to say so. To cover his strange excitement, Miss Vanstone asked, as they followed her sister from the room,

"Where do you propose to go, Leora?"

"Only down to the Devil's Punch-Bowl," said Leora. "Mr. Westmaire has never seen it, and you know it is our only 'lion,' and must be interviewed."

"Is not that a long walk?" suggested her sister.

"Rather," said Leora; "but we will not go so far this time, if you think the distance too formidable."

"Oh, no, I think I can easily accomplish it," smiled Estelle.

They entered the parlor where Everard was waiting, and the four were soon progressing toward that region of the uncanny name which Leora had mentioned as their destination. It was indeed a long walk, but none of them wished it shorter. There are times—we all remember such—when we cling to the present moment as if the next were to bring upon us some great calamity; times when the shadow of some dark event yet to be seems cast upon us, and we shrink from going to meet the stern reality; and this feeling it was which had stolen strangely enough into the hearts of all the four people of whom I write, and made them linger on their way, and take at last a roundabout path to lengthen out their walk. They all alike felt the influence, but only one of them spoke of it.

"Miss Leora," said Everard Westmaire, suddenly coming to a full stop, and looking with his luminous black eyes full into hers—"Miss Leora, how do you feel?"

"How do I feel? Why—much as usual, I think," fibbed Leora, who seldom confessed to any uncommon emotion.

"Truly?" said Everard, walking on again beside her; "from your appearance I fancied that you felt as strangely as I do; and upon my soul, I never felt so strangely in my life! What is the matter with me, I wonder?"

"Did you speak to me, Everard?" asked Colonel Hildreth, who was walking with Estelle somewhat in advance of the other two. Everard had raised his voice in speaking, and Owen imagined that it was to call his attention.

Everard replied in the negative; and Estelle, looking back, smilingly hoped he and Leora were not quarrelling.

"Oh, no, indeed!" responded her sister. "Mr. Westmaire is in a state of mind, he says, but I haven't provoked him, I assure you!"

They went on after that, in silence, until a mad roar of waters burst upon their ears, and they came at once upon "the Devil's Punch-Bowl." A wild river, that was tame enough in the town above where it meekly turned a score of water-wheels, went mad again, just here, and leaping over a parapet of rocks, with a plunge as if it was about to disappear forever, tumbled into the unfathomed abyss underneath the falls. It was a wide, yawning chasm into which the waters fell, a little bowl-shaped; whence its name; and far down at the bottom could be seen the white and foaming water, boiling and plunging and leaping up against the rocky sides, as the little river rolled over the precipice, and dropped into its tomb, with a roar that never ceased.

Perhaps a quarter of a mile below, at the foot of the rocky hill in the heart of which the river thus buried itself, there was a low, tunnel-like cave; out of the mouth of which the bright stream came to life again, and flowed away over the low-lying meadows beyond, clear and placid, and smiling in the sunlight as cheerily as if it never had been prisoned in any gloomy channel under ground. There was a story of a boat with two children sitting in it, which had floated down from its mooring-place in some mill-pond, and been carried over the falls and down into the "Devil's Punch-Bowl;" and afterward the two drowned children, with the fragments of their shattered skiff, had drifted out upon the placid tide of the little river as it rippled forth from that tunnel under the hill!

This was "the Devil's Punch-Bowl;" that "lion" of the country which Leora had brought Everard Westmaire to "interview." And certainly its impression upon him was profound enough to satisfy the most exacting guide. He stood upon the brink of the chasm, looking down into the roaring depths below, and a strange, shuddering horror took possession of him, blanching his face to almost the whiteness of the foam that streaked the falls, and causing him to shiver like a leaf in the wind.

"Good heavens! what a horrible pit!" he muttered; "it fairly sickens me!"

"How pale you are, Mr. Westmaire!" cried Leora. "I verily believe you are afraid of our lion, 'when he roareth!' What would you do, if he opened his mouth and swallowed you?"

"Don't speak of such an awful possibility,

for heaven's sake, Miss Leora!" cried Everard, turning whiter yet, if possible. "I believe the stake itself would be preferable to death in that devil's cauldron!"

They all laughed at his vehemence, and Estelle came up beside him where he stood gazing down into the chasm, and drew his attention to the clear sweep of the water over the precipice, as a preface to the legend of the boat and the children whose fate had given the requisite tinge of horror to the romantic interest of the place. She was proceeding to relate the story, when Colonel Hildreth, to whom it was familiar, turned aside to collect some brilliantly tinted autumn leaves, which made a very lovely spot of color at the edge of the fading woods.

He had just put out his hand to bend down the glowing branch, when it was arrested by Leora's voice piercing the air in a shriek that made his blood run cold. In a moment he was at her side—and she was alone!

"Leora, for God's sake—" he uttered.

She checked him by pointing to the place where Estelle and Everard had stood. A glance told the tale that froze the very words upon his lips, and he looked in mute and stony horror at the loose pebbles and gravel that still rolled over the sharp descent. A thin layer of soil had lodged there, overgrown with moss and grass, and this had been loosened by some fatal misstep, and giving way beneath the feet of the two who stood upon it, slid from its place and carried them with it into the gulf! They were lost.

Owen turned his pallid face toward Leora just in time to see her falling and catch her in his arms. He carried her insensible form to the nearest highway, and a passing carriage bore her to the manor house, to which her sister should nevermore return alive. Leora Vanstone was its mistress now, but to the day of her death she never forgot the sister whose awful fate had made it her own, or the brilliant youth who, sharing that fate, had perhaps escaped a yet more bitter one.

They watched for the lifeless forms of Estelle and Everard Westmaire, and in time they were found, when the burrowing river bore them to the light and cast them on the shore; and thenceforth a new horror was added to the legend of "the Devil's Punch-Bowl."

For Leora, she left off flirting forever that

day; and the colonel, remembering what Estelle had told him, wooed and won her for his wife. He did not find her a perfect

woman, but she was not the heartless creature he had believed her, and he loved her well.

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THE DIAMOND OF JOSEPH HIERSON.

BY HENRI MONTCALM.

"Well," says Joe Hierson, a good deal amazed and not a little indignant at coming in unexpectedly one evening and finding the new boarder, who roomed opposite to him, down upon his knees before his (Joe's) trunk, busily examining the contents of the tray, "I must say you're a cool one."

The "cool one" started and looked around, his pale face flushing a little. Joe went on with increasing wrath.

"How long since you got your appointment?" he inquired with deep irony.

"My appointment? I don't understand you."

"Why, your appointment in the Custom House. You seem to be around examining trunks. You'll find a lot of silk dresses and six or eight broadcloth suits and a quart or so of diamonds there. I suppose they are all contraband."

At these words the intruder's face broke into one of those bright, winning smiles which so few faces are capable of, and upon which no man's anger can look and live. He certainly looked like anything but a thief as he stood there, without any trace of confusion on his handsome, refined countenance.

"You are determined to have your joke, Hierson," he said, still smiling. "You've caught me in *flagrante delictu* this time, sure enough. I confess it does have rather a bad look. I was skirmishing round for a shirt-button, and, finding your trunk open, I looked there. You don't want any receipt for this, I suppose?" And he held out the button to show that his search had been successful.

The explanation was simple and straightforward enough, and satisfied Joe at once. Joe was a good-hearted, impulsive sort of fellow, and if he was quick to suspect, he was at least quite as ready to lay aside his suspicions. He knew it was just like him to go off and leave his trunk standing open, and he knew, too, that it was quite in accordance with boarding-house etiquette, at least with the etiquette of Mrs. Marrowphat's boarding-house, to go around as much as one pleased hunting for shirt-buttons in

each other's rooms. Besides, he had never in all his life met such a right down good fellow as Devens was. The two had grown quite intimate during the fortnight the latter had been at Mrs. Marrowphat's; and Joe began himself to think he must have been joking. Of course he must! Devens was the last man in the world to play sneak thief. So, as a kind of reparation, Joe offered to sew the button on for him, and they accordingly went into the other's room, and Devens sat down on the bed and held out his arm, all the while running on in that easy, chatty way of his that always fascinated everybody. Nobody could deny that Devens was a very superior person, not only gifted by nature, but cultivated and refined by education.

"I tell you what it is," presently remarks Joe, winding the thread clumsily around the button several times preparatory to finishing off the job, "old Marrowphat didn't give us much to eat tonight, and I'm frank to acknowledge I'm confoundedly hungry. I think I could eat half a hog, and not feel it."

"And I believe I could dispose of the other half with equal impunity. I feel rather bearish myself. What do you say to pie?"

"Pie! Delicious! But the closet is locked."

"Ay, but love shall turn the key. Do you know, I fancy I've quite won the affections of the Lady Superior? Tell you what I'll do," Devens goes on volubly, after a slight pause. "You just sit right here and don't move until I come back, and if I don't get a couple of mince pies out of *Soeur Marrowphat*, I'll—eat her!" And with such anthropophagus resolve, Devens throws on his coat carelessly and vanishes below stairs.

Joe puts his feet on the counterpane, tilts back his chair, and sits quite still for upwards of seven minutes, his eyes on the ceiling and his thoughts on pie. At the end of that time growing a trifle tired of waiting, he picks up Devens's flute, and extracts therefrom a feeble and wheezy imitation of "Home, Sweet Home." How the deuce it

is Devens can blow it so smoothly, he can't see. Then he lays down the flute, and begins drumming on the table in accompaniment to a few mutilated bars of the "Maid of Athens," humming over the places where he doesn't know the words. Finally he grows really impatient. What can have become of the man? Is the landlady suddenly turned unpropitious? At any rate, Joe can't stand this any longer. He will organize an exploring expedition to go in search of his missing comrade.

So he steals quietly down-stairs, taking the front way as the course least likely to excite suspicion. In the lower hall, he pauses before the hat-tree as if it were a family ghost. Where the deuce is his overcoat and seal-skin cap? A terrible doubt flashes across his mind. He utters a phrase that sounds very much like "condemn it," only it isn't that exactly, and rushes upstairs again, three steps at a time. Arrived at his room, down he drops before his trunk, taking out the tray and diving deep into the depths below. Vain search! He knows that well enough long before he has reached the bottom, and found the box gone; the box that contained all Joe's first-class valuables—to wit, the greater part of his last month's salary, which he had neglected to put in the bank; a heavy gold watch and chain which had been his mother's; and a costly diamond ring, with several minor trinkets, that his cousin Rhoda had sent back to him last summer when they had their quarrel and parted. It was a first-rate match, everybody had said. Joe was in his uncle's counting-room, a steady, industrious fellow, and liable to become old Treve-thick's partner any time; and Rhoda was handsome and rich and a lady, only she was such a high-strung thing, it would be hard work getting along with her, people guessed. And so it proved before they had been engaged a month; and, much to his uncle's disappointment, who looked upon him already as his own son, and to his own grief—for the poor fellow was dreadfully cut up about it—Joe came back in September to his old life, with a hope gone out of it that had made it very beautiful in times past.

But I digress. The box was gone, and Devens had got it. Joe wasn't so much grieved at his loss just then as he was mad at the way he had been taken in.

"I swear!" he remarked, fervently, to himself, "that man would talk over an ad-

vancing Juggernaut with that glib tongue of his." Then he seized an old straw hat from a peg in the clothes-press, and hurled himself down-stairs again and out at the front door, rushing frantically along the street for two or three blocks before he realized that he was chasing nobody in particular, and that he was out in the rain without any overcoat. Then he turned and went slowly and sadly back to his room; and he took down his last winter's coat, and brushed it up, and never said a word of the affair to anybody for three months.

Old Treve-thick, Rhoda Treve-thick's father and Joe Hierson's employer and uncle, rich as an Indian prince, and just about as arbitrary, lived in a fine house in a country village, an hour's ride or more from the city where he did business. Latterly he had left the care a good deal with Joe, coming to town only two or three days in the week.

One day, after five o'clock, there came a telegram from the old man commanding his nephew to come out to Greenville at once. Joe hated to go badly enough. Aside from the fact that he had important work still to do that night, he had never been out at Treve-thick House nor seen his cousin Rhoda since last summer, and he felt that it was better for him to stay away. But he had no choice in the matter now, and hastily giving to an under-clerk such instructions as were necessary, he hurried off to catch the next train.

His uncle was not sick, as Joe had feared, but he was very nearly insane.

"Joe," he gasped, coming half way across the lawn to meet him, and flourishing his cane in the most sanguinary manner, "*what* do you think Rhoda has been and done? Confound the girl! She always would have her own way. She said she'd do it, and she has."

"Done what?" Joe demanded, turning a shade paler.

"Eloped with that — Leffingwell." (The reader will please understand a past participle.)

Joe seemed to feel his heart suddenly stop beating altogether. He had heard about this Leffingwell, of course. The old man had a long story of his grievances to relate every time he came to town; and bitter enough it was to poor Joe to learn that another was so easily winning the love that was no longer his. Old Treve-thick had disliked this Leffingwell from the first. "He

is too smooth-tongued and white-fingered for me," he had said, with old-fashioned discernment; "and as for his hanging around my girl, I won't have it!" And so, finally, some few days before, he had forbidden the unwelcome suitor the house. A brief note left in her room late that afternoon had informed him that Rhoda had gone off with her lover. She should be married that night at B—, she said. It was useless to pursue her. She was of age, and should do as she pleased.

"Where is the note?" Joe asked, with set teeth, when he had heard all this from his uncle.

"In her room on the table, just where I found it."

Joe hastened up to Rhoda's room. The first article there that caught his eye was a photograph in a blue passe-partout frame. He stared at it a moment, scarcely crediting his senses. Then he seized it and ran back to his uncle.

"In Heaven's name, Uncle Trevethick," he cried, "whose picture is that?"

"That? That's *him*!"

"Who?"

"Bob Leffingwell."

Joe rubbed his eyes in a dazed sort of way. "Uncle," he said, despairingly, "if there's any truth in photographs, this man's name is not Leffingwell, but Devens, and Rhoda has married a sneak-thief!"

"Not yet she hasn't; but she will before midnight." Then the poor old fellow broke down all at once, sobbing bitterly. "In God's name, Joe," he cried, "what is to be done? We can't let her marry that rascal."

"But, if we could overtake her, uncle, you know very well we could not persuade her."

"You could tell her what you know about her, Joe."

True, he could do that; but would she believe him? Would she not rather think his story some weak invention of his own, born of his jealousy and his disappointment? He groaned to himself as he thought how entirely helpless he was to save the girl whom he loved better than all the world, in spite of her faults. Then a thought struck him. He looked at his watch.

"Uncle," he said, hurriedly, "there is one thing we can do. If we can't stop her, may be we can stop *him*. At any rate, let us hope for the best. I'll go and have out

the horses at once. We must overtake them."

And Joe posted off to the stables.

There was just a chance of their getting to Alderney before the late express came along. Leffingwell probably was not aware that the seven-o'clock train on the main line had been discontinued the previous week, and the fugitives would have to wait at the Alderney station until 9.15 P.M. It was now six o'clock, and it was over thirty miles from Greenville to Alderney. The road was hilly, and in bad condition, but it was their only chance.

In five minutes the team was ready. Joe had ordered out the light buggy; he knew the grays well, and he meant to get their best out of them tonight. They dashed out of Greenville at just quarter past six, and took the government pike. The old man sat in silence, with his overcoat buttoned up tight to his chin. He kept his eye steadily fixed on the road before, thinking only of his child whom they rode to save. The sun was dropping down, flushed and red, behind Wilder's woods, and the tall shadows of the horses kept pace with them upon the roadside wall as they bowled along. On and on and on. The twilight shades were falling as they passed through Ireton, and then, as they trotted swiftly over the old tide-mill bridge and out into the country again, they saw the moon, full and beautiful, slowly climbing above Sky-high Hill. And now night shut in all about them, moonlit and starry and splendid. Yet little did either of them think of all this in that hour of terrible suspense. One question they kept asking themselves and each other—"Shall we be in time?"

It was considerably after eight now, and they had put only half the distance behind them. The grays were never in better trim; thank Heaven for that! They took to their work like hounds to the chase, and seemed not a bit less fresh than at the start. They rounded the curve at Bowen's Creek at twenty minutes before nine; then the shining river was reached and passed, and Endicott Iron Works loomed up like a mountain of living flame a moment before them, then flashed by, and vanished in the darkness behind. And now there were only three miles of smooth road between them and Alderney Junction. How beautifully the horses did act! They seemed to have a heart in the work, as if they under-

stood well how much depended upon them. There was no doubt now; they would make the junction before the express came along. But there was something else to be done. Joe knew well that nothing they could do would stop the runaway couple, if Rhoda was determined to go on. There was but one human hand could help them now—the iron hand of the law.

At just five minutes past nine they entered Alderney village. They made a slight detour to avoid the station. It would not do for Rhoda to catch sight of the horses. Joe knew the place well, and drove straight to Squire Allison's, an old family friend. Luckily the squire was at home, and there was a constable living a short distance away. While a servant was despatched to summon the latter official, Squire Allison hurriedly drew up a warrant on Joe's affidavit for Leffingwell's arrest. The charge was breaking into Joe's trunk and robbing him of some valuable jewels. Joe had no idea of prosecuting him now that Rhoda might be mixed up in the affair. His only wish was to stop Leffingwell before the marriage could take place.

All this, the sending for the constable and making out the warrant, did not occupy more than six or seven minutes, though to the two anxious men who were waiting the time seemed very long. The station was only a few rods by a cross-walk from the squire's, and at length, accompanied by the constable, they started over on foot. They were not a moment too soon. Even as they stepped from the platform, there came up from the south a shrill whistle, and they saw the glowing headlight of the locomotive as it came into view less than a mile down the track. They went straight to the waiting-room. Yes, they were there, sure enough. They had expected to find them, and yet neither Joe nor Mr. Trevethick could quite command himself as the eyes of each one fell upon Rhoda and her lover just rising to go out on the platform. For the old man, the suspense of the last few hours had been terrible; and now, as he saw his daughter once more, and realized that they had come in time, he tottered feebly toward her, and sank down exhausted on the settee where she had been sitting. Rhoda understood of course that they had come to take her back. She flashed one look of bitter disdain at Joe from her bright black eyes, but vouchsafed him no word of recognition.

Then she turned to her father. Poor Rhoda! Proud and wayward and headstrong she certainly was, but she loved her father, and the sight of him now, haggard and fainting beside her, cut her to the quick. She sat down by him, and took his trembling hand in hers.

Meanwhile, Joe had made for Leffingwell at once. He knew him in a moment; the same clear-cut features and curly black hair, and the same look of assured serenity as he met Joe's eye.

"Devens, a word with you, if you please," says Joe, a trifle roughly.

"Excuse me," answers Devens, courteously, "there must be some mistake. My name is not Devens, and I don't remember ever having met you before."

"As you please," replies Joe, growing good-natured as he realizes that the game is in his own hands this time. "But whoever you are, I've something to say to you. Shall it be here or outside?"

Devens felt that on the whole whatever business Joe and his rough-looking companion had with him had better be transacted out of Rhoda's presence. He turned to her a moment.

"Don't be afraid, Rhoda," he said to her. "You are your own mistress, and they can't force you to go back. I must go out a moment and see what it's all about. You'll have to come out at once yourself. The train does not wait any."

Rhoda looked up at him with a kind of defiant light in her eyes.

"I shall stay with my father," she said, simply, and turned away with no other word.

After all, what was this man, or any man on earth, to her, that she should go away from her dear old father and break his heart? She really felt a sort of resentment toward Leffingwell for the part he had led her to play. For my own part, I don't believe she would ever have cared for him at all, nor that she really did care very much for him now, only she was just that kind of person to be stimulated by opposition. Possibly she was rather glad than otherwise that she had been overtaken.

Leffingwell seemed to comprehend that his prospects were getting anything but brighter. He followed Joe out with a half-audible oath.

"Now," said he, "what is it you want of me? Please be as expeditious as possible.

I expect to be married tonight, and my time is limited."

"Well, to begin with," said Joe, with grim humor, "I'd like to know if you got those pies. I'm getting hungry."

"Be good enough to talk sense," Devens retorted, icily.

Just then the conductor shouted—

"All aboard."

"And secondly," Joe went on, "I want you to get on board this train, and never show your face about here again."

"I decline."

"Very well, then, my friend Warren, here—ah! pray excuse me: Mr. Warren, Mr. Devens—he will at my request serve this warrant on you, and lock you up for the night in Alderney jail."

The constable chuckled pleasantly and held out the document. Devens saw also that he had a pair of handcuffs ready. He gave a glance at the warrant, and hesitated. Then the train began to move, and one car then another rolled past him. The constable, stepping forward with his wristlets, decided him. He caught at the platform of the last car, and in a moment more had disappeared within.

Joe went back to the waiting-room. Rhoda was talking tearfully to her father, who seemed quite himself again. She raised her head haughtily as he came in. But Joe was as proud as she in his way. He first stepped up to his uncle, and said, "The up-train will be along in a few moments, and you can go back tonight. I will stay, and bring the horses down tomorrow." Then he lifted his hat stiffly, said good-night, and was gone.

The next day, when Joe Hierson drove the grays into his father's stable, the coachman told him Miss Trevethick would be glad if he would call at the house a moment. The message surprised but delighted him. He found her in the library, and she rose to meet him, and put out her hand frankly as he entered.

"Cousin Joe," she began, with refreshing candor, "I've made a goose of myself, I know; but I don't want anybody ever to mention it again. I understand perfectly well, however, what I owe to you, and I—I wanted to thank you for it." Here she faltered a bit, and then went and sat down, and, covering her flushed face with her hands, burst into tears—more from shame

and mortification, I am inclined to think than anything else.

Poor Joe didn't know exactly what to do at this sudden exhibition of weakness. He did manage to realize, however, that the girl he loved was sitting before him, and he felt that it was now or never with him. So he went and sat down beside her, and awkwardly took her hand. Then he stared at it in blank amazement.

"Good gracious, Rhoda!" he cried, finding speech at last, "where did you get that diamond?"

She looked up through her tears. "*That!*" she cried, with a kind of shame-faced exasperation. "I had forgotten I had it on. He gave it to me,"—and she pulled it from her finger, and, in a most becoming little fury, flung it from her into the fireplace, where, as the day was cool, there chanced to be an old-fashioned wood fire. Joe darted forward and rescued it from the hot ashes.

"Cousin Rhoda," he said, bending over her, "this is the diamond he stole from my trunk last winter, and the one you sent back to me. "He has only changed the setting. I'd know it anywhere by its cutting."

She still hid her face in her hands, and said not a word.

"Rhoda, why won't you let me put it back where you just took it from?"

"What! with that same setting? I should *hate* it!" and her eyes flashed vindictively as she looked up again. Then she seemed to understand from Joe's enraptured expression that by her own words she had at least entertained the idea of wearing the ring again if he would get it reset. Joe followed up his advantage mercilessly.

"Well, may I get it set over, cousin?"

The only answer was a smothered "Oh! oh! oh!" and then presently, "Go back to town, and don't come near me again for a whole *month*, and then I'll—I'll see." Saying which, before he could stop her, she had darted away, running up-stairs to her room and slamming the door behind her.

Joe sighed, and went off to town at once; but only three days after that he got an exceedingly humble note from his cousin, saying that, if he cared, he might come out and see her as soon as he pleased. He went, and took his diamond with him; and Miss Trevethick was this time quite satisfied with its new setting.

THE DIAMOND RING.

BY CARRIE D. BEEBE.

It was not right, perhaps, but it was true, that Richard Anthon, professor of mathematics in the "Young Ladies' Seminary," at Thorntown, was deeply in love with little Bess Hopkins, one of the pupils.

Bessie was one of the older girls, bright-eyed and small for her age; which, possibly, was one reason why she appeared so well in Richard's eyes. He led, on the whole, a rather stupid life, being a country teacher on a small salary, and, as he fancied, with dull pupils; for, he said, young ladies as a general rule, did not like or understand mathematics, unless it was to calculate the cost of some poor girl's bonnet or dress.

Bess, however, proved an exception to his rule, for her statements were always correct, and there was seldom a problem, however difficult, which she could not readily solve. Then, too, she answered his questions distinctly, without simpering or lip-ping; and never appeared to know that it was possible for him to exist outside a recitation room.

This, perhaps, was another reason why

he thought well of Bess, for men are invariably fond of the novel and mysterious; and Richard, being rather fine-looking, was a favorite with his pupils; and it was something new for one of them to appear indifferent toward him. He was always planning ways and means for becoming acquainted with Bessie's family, for it was a well-known fact that Judge Hopkins, her father, although wealthy himself, always chose his associates and friends according to his personal likes and dislikes, without stopping to ask whether they were rich or poor; and in this particular, Bessie resembled her father.

The judge lived in an elegant residence a short distance from Thorntown, and he rode down to his office every morning, bringing Bessie to school at the same time. He was very fond of her, as she was his youngest, and only unmarried child.

Richard had never been introduced to the judge, for he was a close student and found but little time for society. Mrs. Hopkins was something of an invalid and very domestic in her tastes; and Bess would never in-

vite him to call upon her, as many of the young ladies did, so he was at a loss how to proceed in the matter.

After revolving the subject in his mind, he determined to become better acquainted with Bess, or rather, give her an opportunity for becoming accustomed to his society. So he engaged her in conversation whenever an opportunity offered, but to his disappointment she would always grow confused, and answer at random.

He was so provoked when he knew she was so clear-headed, and could converse so prettily with the girls, and even with Mr. Adair the principal. Then he thought of calling upon Judge Hopkins, and asking permission to address her, but he feared the judge would mistake him for a fortune-hunter. At last, he determined to tell Bess he loved her, for she was to graduate at the close of the term, and he feared he might not have an opportunity afterward. The last week of the school year Mr. Adair always gave a picnic to the pupils, and Richard determined to learn his fate on that day. "It is cowardly," he said to himself, "to love a girl, and be afraid to tell her so."

The day of the picnic dawned bright and clear. They were to sail a short distance up the river, and then land, and partake of a collation in a pleasant grove near its banks. Afterward, they were to go into the fields in search of wild flowers. It would be very easy to find an opportunity to tell Bess all that was in his heart; no one would think strange of his speaking to her, and, surrounded by the beauties of nature, he could not fail to be eloquent in his appeal. She could do no more than refuse him, and that could hardly be worse than the suspense which he now endured, and if she really did love him—he blushed—although a man—at the thought.

Bess, arrayed in white, with a coquettish hat, was gayer than usual, and kept the girls laughing at her lively sallies. The day was delightfully fine, just warm enough to make the shade refreshing. The spring flowers had faded, but, after rambling about for some time, they were rewarded by finding some wild roses. Richard gathered a large cluster; and as Bess, tired and rosy, sat in the shade a little apart from the rest, he approached, and, taking a seat by her side, gave her the flowers. She took them with a blush and a pretty murmur of thanks, which would have been very encouraging,

if he had not observed upon the hand in which she held them a diamond ring.

Now diamonds were rare in Thorntown, not to be thought of, in fact, except as a token of engagement; and uncommon, even in such cases. Bess had never worn the ring before, he was sure of it; besides, it was quite new; she was, undoubtedly, already engaged.

Bess, entirely unconscious of what was passing in his mind, placed the roses in her hat, and the diamond flashed, and sparkled in Richard's eyes until he began to think it was an evil spirit.

The rest of the day was a blank to him—he could not distinctly remember anything that occurred afterward. He rallied, next morning, however. "It will not be much longer," he said, "and then I'll leave the place forever."

Richard was poor. He had chosen the law for his profession, had studied hard, and had been admitted with honor; but his utmost efforts had failed to establish a practice, and, discouraged, he had taken up teaching from sheer necessity, always intending, however, to resume the law, if he could ever find an opening. With this object in view, he spent a portion of his evenings in reading, that he might keep well posted. With economy, he had been able to lay aside a small sum from his salary, and with this, he determined to make a new beginning in some town where he was entirely unknown.

Commencement day arrived. Richard had fully resolved to forget little Bess; consequently, he hardly took his eyes from her face during the whole day. Judge Hopkins was present, and observed Richard very closely.

That evening, as Bess and her father sat out on the porch, he said, "Bessie, who was the teacher who gave you your diploma, to-day?"

"It was Mr. Anthon, papa," she said, with a blush which his quick eye detected.

"How is this?" asked the judge. "I saw that he hardly took his eyes from your face to-day, and now, when I ask you about him, your face is rosy in a moment. Has he given you love-lessons, Bess?"

"He never spoke to me upon the subject of love, papa."

"He is a fine-looking young man. Do you know anything of his history?"

"Nothing, except that he studied law,

but being unable to establish a practice, he became a teacher. His family is very respectable, I am told."

The judge put on his hat and went out. "I believe they love each other," he soliloquized, "and Anthon is afraid to speak because he is poor. I am something of a judge of human nature, and if he is as much of a man as I think, his poverty shall not stand in the way of Bessie's happiness."

He repaired at once to the seminary, where he found Richard in conversation with Mr. Adair. After having expressed himself as entirely satisfied with the plan upon which the school was conducted, he proceeded to draw Richard out. The result of their conversation was entirely satisfactory. Richard told him of his plans, his struggles, and his failures, and at the close the judge offered him a place in his office. "I have long wanted a suitable partner," he said, "for I am growing old, and wish to partially retire from business."

Richard was highly delighted with the idea, and at once accepted the generous offer. The plan proved successful, and the judge was more than pleased with him. As he often invited Richard to his house, he met Bessie often, and he thought, with a sigh, how delighted he would have been with his position a few months before. One thing puzzled him, however. He never saw

Bess in company with any particular gentleman, and never heard, in any way, the slightest allusion to her future marriage. She seemed very happy, and often received rich and handsome gifts from her father.

At last, it seemed to Richard that she might possibly have obtained the ring in this way, and one day, when they were left alone in the parlor, he found courage to ask her about it.

"You have a lovely diamond ring, Miss Bessie," he said, "it is an engagement ring, I suppose?"

"No, indeed, it is a present from papa. He gave it to me on my eighteenth birthday."

"What an idiot I am!" he said, taking a seat by her side. "Do you know, Bess, I love you dearly, and I would have told you so on the day of the picnic, if it had not been for that ring?"

Bess didn't know it, of course, though she had often wondered at his singular conduct on that day.

"You will forgive me, wont you, Bessie dear, for being so very stupid, and tell me that you love me in return?"

And Bessie, too tender-hearted to refuse him, with downcast eyes, and her hands imprisoned in his, gave him the answer he sought.